

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 3rd Sunday Advent Year A1

I mentioned last Sunday that we have a two week run with John Baptist; so here is part two. However, John's appearance this week is off-screen, to which he is best suited. He just sets up the real action of today's gospel, which amounts to the number of Jesus' disciples increasing with new ones adding in from John's own following. Again, John is really good at off screen work –that is his specialty. Keep in mind that John is always so humble to say "Make no mistake- I am not the Messiah" (John 1:19-21). In John 1, He will three times deny that he is the Messiah, saying, "I only prepare the way for Lord, only using water while He will bring fire & the Holy Spirit. I am not worthy to untie his sandal (Matt 3:11 changes that to say 'I'm unfit to carry his shoes') which means, 'I am not worthy to fill his shoes'. In John 3:30, the Baptist says, "He must increase, I must decrease". So again, John loves off screen work- unseen, out of view and in supporting roles.

But, doesn't today's gospel raise a big question for us: Why does John send his disciples to Jesus asking, "Are you the ONE?" Why is John acting uncertain, as if he is unsure of Jesus' identity? ***That can't be. John identified Jesus himself in the womb when he leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb in Luke 1:44, and in this same gospel of Matthew 3:14-16, John knew Jesus before his baptism because John hesitated saying, "Wait, you should be one baptizing me" and then in the act itself, John heard God the Father's voice and saw Holy Spirit dove descend upon Jesus. So it can't be that John doesn't know Jesus is the Messiah.***

The reading did say, John was in prison, so maybe he is having a moment of doubt or feeling discouraged that his preparation work isn't bearing any fruit yet. Is he just down in the dumps/dungeons? No, John knows Jesus, and I suggest that this scene is best understood by viewing it as the great transition from focus upon John's ministry to focusing fully on Jesus' ministry. Consider that we are moving from the preparation of the meal to its full enjoyment, the setting of the table to now sitting down at it! John is helping make it so! We are at a transition point!

Coaches are always shouting at players, "Work on your ***transitions***: from football receivers, getting themselves to the ball and catching, & then shifting into run mode-evade tackles, or for basketball teams move quick from defense setup to offense - getting the ball down the court fast. So the key to understanding this whole exchange between John and Jesus is to realize that John is setting up for a compete transition. At just right time, John moves all of his disciples on over to

Jesus. It is all about transitions! That is why John seems to act uncertain and sends his disciples to Jesus with a question about who He is. **'Transitions are so important'**. I sure learned that the other day as I prepared some food and needed to transport it. I am sure this has happened to you at some time, too. I picked up the crock pot, filled with hot vegetables in liquid (smelling delicious), and I get to the back door and guess what, I don't have it opened already, so I have to set everything down and then open door, pick the pot back up and move on through the door. And then repeat that again at truck. Unless, I prepared ahead for the transition by going first, opening doors and leaving them ajar. I am saying that 'working on the transition, makes all the difference between it going smoothly or not'. Here's another example, when the stakes were a little higher. A couple years ago, I was traveling up highway 60 around Cloverport, (of course only about 20 minutes away from an appointment and on time, not early but right on time) and I started hearing that dreaded flapping noise, "ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch, ch"which means a tire is blown out going flat. I had a ford ranger at the time (great vehicle) and I quickly got to work changing it. After loosening the lugs, and raising the jack up under axle. I didn't have the wheels chucked, and sure enough as I pulled the flat tire off, a huge semi blew past me three inches away from my back and the wind gust made the truck lunge forward coming off the jack. Not having the spare tire ready to slip on (it was still up in the carriage under bed), it was going to make a bad, poor transition as the truck was headed to dumping the axle down on to the concrete road. But fortunately, I managed to grab the flat again and at least jam it back on the wheel studs as the truck fell off the jack. That transition point between removing the flat and putting on the new tire is so important, have the next one ready at hand and ready to go at just the right time. The transition is everything. And I think that is the best way to understand what is going on here between Jesus and John. John is trying his best to transfer smoothly all of his disciples to Jesus. I imagine John is concerned that some of his disciples are clinging too much to him, instead of moving on over to the Jesus. Out of affection for John, some of his disciples are remaining by his side in jail. John may sense his imminent execution and he is trying to send over and seal the deal by transferring all of his disciples to Jesus. He knows that if he simply makes the introduction of them to Jesus, then they will be hooked – they will be caught by the original fisher of men. Jesus will hold them. But John needs to lead them by humbling himself

and asking them to do him the favor of going on mission to meet and interview this Jesus (John knows they will stay with him once they listen to Jesus and watch Jesus in action) So, John does just that and he turns over his faithful disciples to Jesus so that his mission can be complete. John transitions all of his work over to Jesus now. Not long after this, John will be executed. But the transition is everything as He transfers, hands over his disciples to their care now under Jesus.

For us in Advent, the lesson here for us is to imitate those disciples. John sent them to go listen to Jesus, watch what He was doing and stay close to Him. As we wait for Christmas, we should do that too. Observe and learn from Jesus remaining by Him as disciples. We do this by keeping our daily practices of spending time with him in prayer or conducting our devotional reading each day, and practicing works of charity and service to others as we wait for Christmas and the coming birth again of Christ into our world.