

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Advent Year B

Do we think we have heard enough about John the Baptist? The past two weeks we have heard about John, and knowing John, I bet the Baptist himself would say, "Enough about me already= Jesus the Messiah to come is who we need to be watching for!" What's with this attention on me? Recall that he says in John 3:30 "I must decrease, and He must increase!" but the Baptizer is a saint, and that tends to happen with them: the more we want to raise them up on a pedestal, the more they push back down-humbling themselves all the more. But about today's gospel, what is most interesting, is that you would be in good company if you got your Johns mixed up. We are hearing about two Johns that are introducing Jesus to us. There is John who baptizes and he is the main testimony giver about Jesus' identity, but also we are being told about the baptizer himself from another John, the evangelist who is writing the story - 4<sup>th</sup> gospel! John's gospel! Both of them are testifying to the light, and both will speak about being firsthand witnesses. They both point out the Christ to us! But as messengers they both face unique temptations. The greatest temptation of a messenger-prophet is that he/she may get in the way of their message and take the primacy away from it, walking on their own words-in effect. So, today we hear of what I call the Baptizer's three temptations in the desert (and he denies the limelight three times-a good 3-fold denial (not like Peter's bad denial of Jesus) because like a good disciple, John is denying himself keeping the attention on Jesus-the Messiah to come. John is saying, "I'm not anything special, don't get stuck on me-it is Christ you need to cling to!"

So, as if we hadn't been learning a lot these past two Sundays about John's humility, we get another dose of it today. Recall that we already learned about John that he was humble enough to simply sit in desert and wait for God, to feed and clothe him- provide him with whatever was available there. John was content to leave the city, live away from all the conveniences and attractions there, to stay in the desert focused on prayer-preaching and preparing others-baptism. To appreciate fully where and why John ends up in the desert, we have to remember where he started out. John's great challenge today to us comes when he says, "I only baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize" (John 1:26) What a surprise, that the Messiah comes and He is not recognized! Could that happen to us? Could we miss the Messiah? Yes, so we have to examine our expectations? Who are we expecting? What are we looking for? What kind of

Savior are we seeking? A messiah made to our tastes-A messiah that always agrees with us, or that we want to do what we say he should do! John says 'not likely' to that! The Messiah may break all of our expectations. He sure did in John's life. What is the best preparation to recognize the Savior? John shows that it is humility. Being open to Christ, means not thinking too much of ourselves. We need Him. John gives a lesson on humility when he is approached by the Jerusalem Temple bosses, Priests & Pharisees, today asking about his credentials. They ask, 'Are you the Christ, or Elijah or The Prophet'? To each temptation John answers, 'No. I am not anything to focus on, the Messiah is Coming, I will point him out when he shows!' John passes the desert temptation exam, just as Jesus will later with his three temptations by the Devil. And John continues on this humble streak when he even does say something about himself, he uses another person's words, just repeating a quote of the prophet Isaiah, saying "I am a solitary voice of one in the desert, saying, 'Make straight the way' John is saying to us, "Get in line with God. Make right or correct anything about yourself that is off God's path. John asks us for Advent, "What do we need to do to adjust, to get attention off ourselves, and keep our every attention on Christ?" What sin or distraction may be keeping our eye turned away from God, that could lead us to miss seeing Christ when He comes? We want to recognize Christ-so stay focused.

Stepping back a minute, I want to add something about John's comment saying he was not worthy to even untie Jesus' sandal strap. I remember when I was newly ordained serving several years as an assistant pastor, often we might get a call to go substitute for an absent pastor. Somehow, I always got the calls to sub for the 'tallest priests we have in the diocese". When I was vesting in the sacristy, all the time I was saying to the servers and helpers, 'Don't even think I could fill the shoes of your pastor, I can't even fill out these vestments. Look this robe swallows me-hanging off my hands" This is what John is humbly saying, to the Temple priests who came out to examine him. He said, "I am not worthy to untie his sandal strap- I'm not getting anywhere near claiming to walk in his footsteps, I can't even untie Jesus' shoe lace". Such a comment about apparel/ clothes is interesting for John, because look at what he had left behind – again, a sign of his humility- remember the dram at his birth over his name- that all had to do with his Father Zechariah being the Temple priest (Levite family) who wore glamorous-ornate robes exercising Temple Duties, and God interrupted that cycle of inheritance, to name John-John. Something new. So John knows about breaking expectations, and being open to seeing God when He comes new. Those

Temple priests were caught off guard by John's attire, his location and preaching. John says, '***There is one among you (the Messiah) you do not recognize.***' Sadly, they will keep on not recognizing Christ even as he teaches and performs miracles right in front of them. But in Advent, that is our job, to recognize Christ when He comes. John gives us the key to recognizing Christ, and it is his example of humility – knowing that he needs God, and simply giving his service to help others be ready too. John wants what God wants, he doesn't want attention to himself, he wants everyone to focus on the Christ to come, and to convert and change and be ready to recognize Him when He shows. A good Advent question for each of us is to ask, "Am I focused enough on God and what God wants (His will and way) to see Christ when He comes?" "Have I stepped into the desert, turning off the distractions to listen and hear God's word of announcement and recognize Him?"