

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 3rd Sunday Advent Year C2

Do we think, (did you hear?) that the people in the gospel might “want to know what they should do?” Three different times in the gospel Luke 3, verses 10, 12, 14, John is asked “What should we do?” by the crowds, tax collectors and soldiers asking John ‘what to do.’ Because, they want to be ready when Messiah comes. John’s reply to them doesn’t call for anything drastic, or that severe, it is not like he told them to build a stadium, build a church, or build a hospital. No, he told them something so basic. To simply think of others, what others might need, what I may have, that could really help them. John is wonderful in his simple clarity. Not complicated at all.

It reminded me of a when I was a teenager and always ushered at my home parish of Lourdes on Saturday night mass. I had arrived at my side door north on the church, and we ushers had a checklist to go through getting ready: 1) make sure collection basket was handy, 2) set out a portion of bulletins on table, as well as the catholic papers (Sunday Visitors) and 3) that the pews in your designated side were tidy. When I showed up, I entered the vestibule door and there was glass everywhere! Yikes! That had never happened. Now what do I do? Fr. Delma always sat in the sanctuary praying before mass so I hesitantly approached him (who wants to take a person out of prayer?) and I sheepishly said, “Fr Delma, the stained glass in the door is broken out all over the floor, what do you want me to do?” I figured it might be an insurance need to report it, take a picture or who knows, but guess what He said. Yes. “Clean it up.” But he was smiling and so was I, because I was just about to add to him, ‘I’ll sweep it up, but did you want to look at it or anything?’ But yes some things are just that simple. Just take care of it. Similarly, when John Baptist is asked “What should we do to get ready for Messiah?” John tells them ‘Be good- be good to each other- think of others and consider what is going on with them.” John is laying out a basic moral teaching of what we are going to later call the ‘golden rule’ or what Jesus teaches later when He says there are only two commands: “Love God and Love Neighbor” That summarizes all religion. Also the letter of James 2:8 calls it, the Royal law, ‘If you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.” And in James 1:27, ‘pure religion is to take care for widows and orphans (those needing the most help). It is that simple, be helpful! Isn’t that a great check or measure to all of our behavior, if we ask ourselves, “Is this helpful?” “Is what I am doing ‘productive’ or ‘constructive’?’ Good question: “Is God being glorified and anybody helped, by what I just said, or what I just did?” John tells the groups specifically, to the crowds “if you have

two coats, shed one and pass along to somebody without one”, to the soldiers and tax collectors he says, “In your work, do a good job and be good in your work, treating people respectfully-yes you may have to do unpleasant things like collect dues-or perform crowd control-tell people what they can/can’t do, but do it respectfully, and not abuse your authority- do not extort folks, bully them or throw your weight around making their lives harder than they already are”. It is interesting that that Luke calls out specifically tax collectors and soldiers. Why? They have jobs most easy to get abusive in. Some jobs involve hard decisions/hard calls - like the guys who have to repossess cars, or conduct evictions. Those soldiers and tax collectors had very unpopular positions. But John was saying, ‘Be respectful of people-don’t lord your authority over them-Bully them-Cheat them’ (tax collectors and soldiers had the full force of Roman Empire behind them-they were like ‘little gods’ on the street)- had power to seize stuff & people (swords?)

That makes me remember one time I was pastoring a small church and leaving the building one day, a gas company guy was walking around, and I said “Can I help you?” He said, ‘I’m looking for the meter?’ I said “Oh it is in the inner courtyard. Come on around here or we can just cut through the building save steps .By the way, what is wrong--are you reading it or suspect a leak?” He said to me, “No, I am here to cut the gas off” Oh no. Long story short, we worked it all out- I said, I know that is your duty to complete this task, but can I drive to office right now and pay it-they radio you?” Again, we worked it out, but I remember him saying before he left, “I kinda thought when we were walking around, you were the nicest person I’ve ever disconnected gas from.”

But again, those occupations of tax collectors and soldiers named by Luke are singled out because of the great potential of abuse against the people in them. So, Luke has John saying, ‘Jesus came for everyone; even tax collectors, but we have to consider other people (what they need-how they feel) and what the treatment give them-what effect that has on them. So John told everyone simply enough, to treat the other person as you would want to be treated. That is the message: show some love and keep concern in your heart for the other person. As a perfect Advent message, John is saying, “We want to make changes in our lives to get ready to meet Christ at His coming again. What if He is that person there?” The change may be to consider always the person we are dealing with now is Christ come again! Does that change how we interact with them? That is how to get ready for Christ’s coming again, his rebirth into our world come this Christmas! We look for Him coming to us in everyone we interact with!