

Opening the Word: A great flowering



What a difference a week makes. On the Second Sunday of Advent, we heard about John's cry, calling us to a baptism of repentance. We heard his promise that there was another who was coming, who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit.

And now, the Baptist is in prison. While in prison, he has heard about the marvelous works of Jesus. John wonders to himself, "Is this the one who is coming?"

Jesus responds with more than the Baptist could have expected. The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are healed. The Good News has come to the poor sons and daughters of Israel.

In other words, the Messiah has come.

These words must have been a strange balm for John the Baptist. On the one hand, he longed for this day. His baptism of repentance was intended to prepare the way for this moment, for the coming of the great King and Prophet. And now, he's here.

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| <p><u>Dec. 15 -Third Sunday of Advent</u></p> |
| <p>Is 35:1-6, 10 Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10 Jas 5:7-10 Mt 11:2-11</p> |

At the same time, John is in prison, arrested by the worst of kings, Herod. He will become the pawn of Herodias, the illegitimate wife of Herod's brother. John's head will be severed, delivered to the delight of the royal court.

Jesus' moment of self-revelation is tied to the martyrdom of John the Baptist. Because he promised that the kingdom of God was at hand, because he preached conversion, John will die.

In prison, perhaps the words of Isaiah came into John's mind. The coming of the kingdom of God in Isaiah is accompanied by a great flowering. The desert will become a fruitful garden. God's vindication will put an end to injustice. And all the nations will come streaming into Zion to worship the one God.

But the arrival of the kingdom will not be bloodless. It will result in the death of John the Baptist. The Messiah himself, the Word made flesh, will be crucified on the cross. His disciples will be arrested and murdered.

The advent of the kingdom of God seems linked to violence and death.

Perhaps this is related to the very nature of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus Christ. The kingdoms of the world are often addicted to the shedding of blood. We need only read a history of the 20th century to remember humanity's addiction to violence.

Genocides and wars. Abortion and physician-assisted suicide. Colonialism and racism. If violence begets violence, then we are sons and daughters of bloodshed.

The advent of God's kingdom, not surprisingly, elicits violence. The peace of the kingdom of God is abhorred by those grown sick by bloodlust.

And yet, perhaps this violence opens the possibility of something more. The coming of the kingdom of God, the advent of Jesus Christ, is an occasion of joy.

It's not the joy of those who ignore the sufferings of the present age, putting a good face on a rough situation.

Rather, it's the sure joy of those who know that Jesus Christ

suffered all that human beings could throw at him, all the violence we could foment, and still, divine love won!

Love wins. In the deserts of hatred and violence, in the deserts of political one-upmanship, in the deserts of a culture of death, the resurrected Christ reigns.

This seems like a strange thing to contemplate as we move toward Christmas. But unless we recognize what the coming of that little infant meant to this inhuman age, we won't be able to join the angels in singing, Glory to God in the highest.

Rejoice! For God is coming.

Get ready for quite the ride.

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