

Do We Recognize Jesus?

Is. 61: 1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thess. 5: 16-24; Jn. 1: 6-8, 19-28

We come now to the Third Sunday of Advent and, even in these dark days of the pandemic and with all the other issues that we face, we can still feel our pulses starting to quicken at the thought that this time of penance and expectant waiting for Jesus will soon come to an end.

The Jewish people, exiled in Babylon, were longing to go back home. They were waiting for God to lead them out of captivity and to heal their sorrows. Hundreds of years later, they were still waiting for their Messiah. By this time, they were back in their homeland but it was under the occupation of the Romans.

When the Jews heard about John the Baptist who was preaching repentance, baptizing, and creating a large following, they thought that he might be the one, the long-awaited Messiah. But John humbly said that he was not the Messiah. He said that he was just a voice crying out and preparing the way for the Lord. He was a voice pointing the way to the Word, but he was not the Word.

We are all searching for the Messiah especially during these bleak, cold, dark days with the problems and struggles that we face. We continue to search for someone to bring good news, to bind up our wounds, and to release us from whatever holds us in captivity. Just as the Jews were waiting for the Messiah to come and release them from oppression, we search for the same.

John gave a message of hope when he said: 'Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me.' But the Jews did not recognize Jesus who walked among them. Does John's message ring true for us also? Does Jesus walk among us even now as we wait? Have we failed to recognize Him? How will we be able to see Him?

Our Holy Father in his recently-published encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, points the way. He wrote that we must recognize Jesus in our neighbours, our brothers and sisters especially the poor and the downtrodden. Jesus, Himself, said that, if we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned among us, we will be doing it to Him. (Matt. 25: 40)

If we incorporate the words of Jesus and our Holy Father into our lives, we won't have to look desperately for the Lord. He will reveal Himself to us, in the Eucharist and in our hearts by grace. We will come to realize that Jesus abides in each one of us and we abide in Him, just as He told us. Then we will be able to 'rejoice' according to the words of Isaiah and Paul. Then we will know that the trials that we experience are only 'voices' that will recede and that Jesus is the Word that will remain to guide us and to strengthen us, to comfort us and to console us. Then we will be able to truly celebrate Christmas in the presence of Jesus.