

“What should we do?” (Lk 3:10) ...Third Sunday of Advent, I was struck by the question people asked John the Baptist; What should we do? People, having been challenged to produce ‘good fruits’ ask for advice about how to express their repentance. Their question shows their desire for salvation. Great courage is needed to ask, what should we do? Even greater courage is needed to listen and to heed the answer to that question.

John the Baptist instructed those who wanted to begin a new life, to those who are ready to repent which includes people who are despised by the Jews. The teaching of John the Baptist for the common people has to do with sharing when my neighbors lack sufficient clothing or food. For the tax collectors, it has to do with justice in the course of collecting taxes and other dues. And for the soldiers, it has to do with observing limits in matters of power (no theft, extortion or pressure for more pay), something that can be difficult for military people.

It is a valid question that should be often upon the lips of each one of us who seek to be continually renewed in the spirit and mind of the coming Christ. Christmas is indeed a joyful time for all of us but at the same time it is also time for us to live up to who we are. Our identity is rooted in being the children of God. Christmas is a time of joy, not primarily because we are celebrating the birthday of Jesus but because God is already in our midst as Immanuel. God is with us, not as a judge but as a Savior and that constantly calls us to rejoice with faith and total trust in Him.

Can we rejoice when we see the war and misery around? The circumstances of life do not determine whether or not we should rejoice. The presence of God in our midst calls us to it. The Lord is in our midst whether things are going the way we would like or not. That’s why it is important to remind us who we are and be who we are. When we wander away from being God’s children then the other power takes over us leading us to sin and evil. When we truly realize that God is in our midst, we have no need to deny our own limitations or the legitimate boundaries that define our lives. Rather, ask ourselves like the people of John the Baptist’s time what we should do to bear good fruits of repentance and do it in order to achieve our salvation.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2025.

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