

Third Sunday of Advent

Year A

Isa 35:1-6,10

Ps 146:6-7, 8-9,9-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

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“Looking for the Coming of God”

People who have traveled to the Holy Land have often described their pilgrimage as “one of the most spiritual experiences that they have ever had.” As a result, I too wanted to share in this spiritual encounter. I finally had the opportunity to do so in 1998. The first couple of days I was a little bit disappointed because the “spiritual experience” was not happening to me. As we traveled around Israel, I saw the places where Jesus had been, but I couldn’t see them with “spiritual eyes.” In Nazareth, I saw where the Annunciation took place. In Bethlehem, I saw where Jesus was born. In Jerusalem, I saw where Jesus was lost for three days the temple. I continued to travel throughout Israel to see all the sights where Jesus had been. Despite being at each of these places, I still was missing the best spiritual experience that I had ever had. When I arrived at the Sea of Galilee, it finally hit me. All of a sudden, it all came together and I saw everything with a set of spiritual eyes. For the past couple of days, I was finding bits and pieces of Jesus in places where He had been. At the place where He walked on the water and preached the beatitudes, the whole puzzle came together. My spiritual experience finally hit me

and my spiritual eyes were opened. Instead of seeing just the pieces of the puzzle, I started to see the whole picture for what it was. I was walking in the very places where Jesus walked, taught and performed His miracles. At that moment, I stopped and cried. My heart was moved. I came face to face with the life of Jesus. I realized that I was walking on holy ground. I thanked God for coming to this earth and dying for our sins. I will never forget this pilgrimage and finding God in the bits and pieces of the Holy Land.

This whole idea of finding God in the midst of the bits and pieces of our spiritual experiences in life is at the heart of today's readings. In the letter of St. James, we are told to be patient in our search for the Lord. In the midst of this search, we are called to have a strong spiritual heart that yearns for the love of God. In Matthew's gospel, we hear about John the Baptist's search for the messiah. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was The One. Jesus responded to John's search by giving him bits and pieces in answer to the question. Jesus says: "Tell John what you see. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the dead are raised."

In the first reading, the book of Isaiah predicts what will happen when the messiah comes. It states that when the messiah comes, the blind will see, the lame will walk, the deaf will hear and the dead will be raised. By Jesus responding the way that He did to John's disciples, He was giving bits and pieces of the puzzle that basically revealed that He was in fact the messiah, the Son of God. He was fulfilling the prophecy.

When the Son of God comes to us, we will have the best spiritual experience of our lives. As the Book of Isaiah tells us, this moment will be awesome. In it, the desert will rejoice, the flowers will sing their song of praise, and they will spiritually see the glory of God.

The messages found in today's readings are also to be discovered in our own lives. As we begin the third week of Advent, we too are called to search for bits and pieces of the coming of the Lord in our quest for Him. We are called to look at our life's experiences and to search for the best spiritual experiences that we can. Do we see the Lord coming to us? When I am out shopping at the mall for Christmas gifts, do I see the goodness of God in the people around me? They are searching for the best way to show their Godly love to others through that special present. Do I see God in the bits of this moment? As I see organizations collecting food and clothing for the poor as gifts for Christmas, do I see pieces of God's love? As my family and friends reach out and love me, do I see the face of God in them? On a more personal note, as I reach out with kindness to the people at my work and in my home, do I allow them to see the God who dwells in me?

Whatever the case, during this third week of Advent, we are called to see God in the bits and pieces of the world around us. As we find it, we are called to put them all together and look at the whole picture of how God is all around us and coming to us on a daily basis.

As we see the whole picture, we are invited to have the best spiritual experience of our lives. In it, we come face to face with the love of God that comes to us everyday. This experience of God is what I encountered when all the pieces came together for me in the Holy Land. This is what John and his disciples saw in Jesus. Ultimately, this is what each of us can experience if we search for the coming of

God to us in the world around us. Let this be our spiritual search in preparation for Christmas.