

“Disciples of the Kingdom”

The Third Sunday of Advent - Presided by: Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

12/11/2016

Cathedral of the King

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December 11, 2016: The Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35: 1 – 10/Psalm 146/James 5: 7 – 10/Matthew 11: 2 – 11

Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

The gospel today has John the Baptist sending disciples to Jesus to ask Him a question. His question was whether Jesus was the expected One or whether people should look for somebody else. From birth, I don't think John had doubts in his mind whether Jesus was the Messiah. Before his birth, in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, John already had a revelation of who Jesus was – the Messiah, the coming One, the Lamb of God, the Son of God. In John 3:27, he describes himself as the friend of the groom, and he finds joy in the groom's having his bride. The bride belongs to the bridegroom – not to John or to anyone else. It is not to evangelists even if they put their name on ministries. The Church is the bride of Christ. Our joy is to help prepare the bride for our friend, the bridegroom. We rejoice with Jesus when His bride is prepared and is developing into one that is spotless and without wrinkle.

St. Paul had to correct the Corinthian church because they were thinking that the gifts were to make them look good. In doing so, it is like that they are competing with Christ for the heart and the affection of the bride. The Church would look to “super apostles and to superfaith” because of the gifts that they possess, but it should be pointing the people to Jesus.

I remember the story of a seven year old boy asking his father, “How tall is Jesus?” The father said, “Maybe six feet tall.” The boy replied, “Well, if He is six feet tall and I am four feet tall and He is in me, then, He must be sticking out.” This is our mission. Jesus in us must be sticking out. People should be seeing Jesus instead of us. Like John the Baptist said, “He must increase and I must decrease. He should all the more seen in me and my old self must continue to decrease and decrease.” John sent his disciples to point them to Jesus so that they could see and hear Him.

Jesus proceeds to give an ode to John the Baptist. He said, “John the Baptist is not flaky. He is not a reed shaken by the wind. He didn't care for riches or living in palaces.” He asked the people, “Do you think he is a prophet?” He said, “He is more than a prophet. It is whom it is said, “Prepare the way before My face. His ministry was to exalt the valleys and to lower hills and to make the crooked path straight to bring the kingdom of God nearer.”

This is our mission – to prepare the way of the Lord so that He and His kingdom can come sooner and be manifested sooner. Jesus said, “Among those born of women, no one is greater than John.” What a praise from Jesus Himself so John probably felt, “I am the greatest.” Jesus bursts his bubble by saying, “But in the kingdom of God, the least there is greater than John.” God has called us into His kingdom, so maybe we think that we are greater than John. We are greater than John not in terms of renown, of reward, of repute or benefit, but because our calling in the kingdom of God is higher. If John performed his mission and fulfilled it, our calling is higher in the kingdom of God.

Understand what the kingdom of God is. It is not some pie in the sky. It is not an exclusive club somewhere in the heavens where only those who have made it go. The kingdom of God is more “what” than “where.” It is not an exclusive club where the righteous could enter in and the unrighteous are barred from entering. The kingdom of God is simply where the life of God is lived out by human beings. The kingdom of God is where God’s will is done. The kingdom of God is where everyone lives like Jesus and walks in a manner worthy of their calling. It is where one walks like Jesus, and lives like Jesus who is the perfect embodiment of kingdom living by a human being.

Isaiah 35:8-9, *“A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness.*

The unclean will not travel on it because uncleanness is not there. (Uncleanness is not the kingdom of God.) But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it.

⁹No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there. The redeemed will respond.” The redeemed will respond with obedience to God walking in the manner worthy of their calling, walking in God-likeness, and walking in Christ-likeness.

Jesus, John the Baptist, and the prophets proclaimed the kingdom of God is here, which is the opportunity for us to be walking according to the kingdom ways. It is here now! It is available for us, waiting for us to walk according to its standards. When we do, we find ourselves entering in. Understand when Jesus says, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy. When we walk in righteousness, peace and joy and we enter into the kingdom, we experience it, and we live our eternal life. This is the life being lived in the kingdom and the least in this kingdom is greater than John. This is not in terms of benefit, reward or renown because we all fall short of this, but it is in terms of the standard of our calling.

Cathedral of the King, we have always been a prophetic people. We have always been trailblazers, prophetic and always been called by the same calling as John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord. It is not because we are special, but it is because this is our calling. This is what God called us to be and to do. We who were formerly afflicted, broken-hearted, captives and prisoners, and who mourned, God has caused it to become oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.

The phrase “greater than John” is what I would call “par for the course of the kingdom.” John preached the good news in the wilderness, and this is what we are doing, but in a more and excellent way. He went to where there was no water and no hope. He preached the good news to those who are poor and who needed to be reminded that God loves them, God is not mad at them, God has reconciled them to Himself and God will never leave them nor forsake them. Where there is hatred, injury, doubt, despair, darkness, sadness, we are to bring joy, consolation, hope, faith, and light. We do not seek to be consoled and comforted, but to console. We do not seek to be understood as to understand. We do not seek to be loved as much as to love. We do not complain saying, “Why did You send me to the darkness?” because we have the light. It is not saying, “Why did You send me to a people who have long faces?” This is because we have joy for we come from a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy. Those who are not experiencing peace, give your peace to them because they are in the wilderness.

You, Cathedral of the King, are a prophetic people. You are bringers of good news. Your feet are beautiful because you bring good news. This is our calling. What makes your feet beautiful is because you fulfill your calling. You have good news. The good news is in you, waiting to be told to the poor – those who are destitute because they don’t have knowledge of the love of God. Be with them; identify with them; and go and be with them in the wilderness. Be numbered among transgressors, not to condemn them, but to lift them up from the ash heap. You have to go where they are and not think of the inconveniences.

This is what Jesus did. He came from light, from the Father’s side, and yet, He went down to the mire where we are. He did not just stay with us, He did not just go through our sufferings, struggles and our temptations with us, but He lifted us from here because He had the love, the ability, the life and the peace of God with Him. If we leave people alone in the wilderness, who will give them hope? We are given the opportunity to fulfill our calling

The song says, “Your love is to me like an overflowing stream reaching out. Lord, I have Your love to overcome.” With this ability, we help others who struggle to overcome because we are the bringers of the good news. This is what we do to the least, the lost, the lonely, and the poor. Give them the good news. Sometimes, it may feel like we are

accomplishing nothing, and sometimes, we feel like we are hardly accomplishing anything. Let me encourage you in what St. James said, “Be patient. Just continue to plant and water. Wait for the early and late rains.”

In 1992, Bishop Randolph Adler founded the Charismatic Episcopal Church. He then had two churches and he said to his council, “Our aim is to add eight more churches by the year 2000.” By the year 2000, the Philippines, Africa and Brazil joined CEC, and the goal of ten reached to more than 2,000 churches. It was through planting and watering patiently. What will happen is that the wilderness will blossom profusely and tremendously. It will become glorious and majestic. Waters and streams will break forth where there were none, and the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is calling us to participate in this.

We give our offerings not because God needs funds for His church. He is sufficient already. It is because God wants us to participate in the joy of the Kingdom. We obtain this joy by walking according to His standards, by being greater than John the Baptist.

This is our hope. This is what we patiently wait for. This is the way it was, this is the way it is, and this is the way it will always be in the kingdom of our God.