

Advent 3B - December 2020

Only When I'm Alone

It may be that one of our own challenges is to know who we aren't. There's a story about a woman finding herself alone in an elevator with the famous and very handsome Robert Redford. As the elevator moved up the floors, the woman, like many of us might, found herself uncontrollably staring at the movie star. Finally, in her excitement and nervousness, she blurted out: "Are you the real Robert Redford?" To which Redford responded, "Only when I'm alone." That story reveals that Robert Redford is not simply another pretty face, but he has grown into a wisdom that must serve him well. For like John the Baptist, he obviously knows who he is not. (by Mary Lynn Tobin from *Finding Our Voice*)

Unfinished play:

Nathaniel Hawthorne was an American writer. When he died in 1864, he had on his desk the outline of a play he never got a chance to finish. The play centered on a person who never appeared on stage. Everyone talked about him. Everyone dreamed about him. Everyone awaited his arrival. But he never came. All kinds of minor characters described him. They told everybody what he would be like. They told everybody what he would do. But the main character never appeared.

The Old Testament is something like Nathaniel Hawthorne's play. It too ended without the main character putting in an appearance. Everyone talked about the Messiah. Everyone dreamed about him. Everyone awaited his arrival. But he never came. All kinds of prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, told the people what he would be like. They told the people what he would do. But the Messiah never appeared until the time of the last prophet John the Baptist. [Mark Link in *Sunday Homilies*; quoted by Fr. Botelho.] Fr. Tony (<http://frtonyshomilies.com/>)

Open Up to the Living God

Some time ago, a young executive of the '60s generation came up to me and said, "You know, I think my generation emphasized external, societal morality while the previous generation emphasized internal, personal morality.

That generation believed a moral person would produce a moral society. My generation believed a moral society would produce a moral person."

But John addressed both. If his was a voice that spoke out for social justice and structures of morality, it was also a voice that spoke inwardly for individual integrity.

If it was a mistake to believe moral people automatically produce a moral society, it was also a mistake to believe a moral society will produce moral people.

A good structure administered by corrupt people can produce corruption. And a good person administering a bad structure can still produce corruption.

These days we don't like John's message of personal repentance. If we have the courage, we much prefer to talk about problems out there -- about political and economic reform, about accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness in our educational system, about urban renewal and social action. These should be talked about.

But John presses his message of change even further, right on into the heart of every hearer. And the message is -- repent, turn around, open up, make God the center of your life instead of self, or family, or business, or profession, or sports, or success, or power, or money, or popularity, or status. Turn away from those lifeless, death-dealing idols, says John. Open up to the living God. Make a straight path to your heart for him. (by Maurice A. Fetty from *How to Profit from Prophets*, CSS Publishing Company)

Soap and the Gospel:

A soap manufacturer and a pastor were walking together down a street in a large city. The soap manufacturer casually said, "The Gospel you preach hasn't done much good, has it? Just observe. There is still a lot of wickedness in the world, and a lot of wicked people, too!" The pastor made no reply, until, they passed a little child with dirty linen, making mud pies in the gutter. Seizing the opportunity, the pastor said, "I see, that, soap hasn't done much good in the world either; for, there is much dirt still here, and many people with dirty linen are still around." The soap manufacturer said, "Oh, well, **soap only works when it is applied.**" Then the pastor said, "**Exactly! So it is with the Gospel.**" (Fr. Francis Chirackal C.M.I.) Fr. Tony (<http://frtonyshomilies.com/>).

In his book, *Sources of Strength*, Jimmy Carter tells about Eloy Cruz, who had a highly effective ministry among poor immigrants from Puerto Rico. When Carter asked Cruz the secret of his success, Cruz replied: "Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives. For God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time." Carter says: "That simple yet profound theology has been a great help to me in understanding the Scriptures. In essence, the whole Bible is an explanation of those two loves."