

Advent 3

It is our custom these days to give different names to different generations. But how long has this been our custom?. We might tend to think that this custom is of fairly recent vintage. When I say “fairly recent vintage,” I mean within a hundred years, more or less. For instance, many of us here would be familiar with the phrase, “the roaring twenties.” We know that it refers to the 1920s, and we know that this was the era of prohibition when laws were passed which forbade drinking in public.

Most of us would find it hard to go back before the twenties, but we can go forward from them. For example, the young people of the 1940s here in the United States are now called the greatest generation because of what they did to defeat Germany and Japan in WWII. Then after that war came the age of the baby boomers when birth rates soared. Then came the x generation, 1964 to 1982. Then came the millennials, those born between 1982 and 2000. Those born after 200 are called generation z. So it seems that for the past century or so the generations have been given their own special names.

But that is true not only of generations but also of groups of people. And that is especially true for us who are Christians. We date everything from one man's birth. We don't know when exactly he was born, but we have chosen a date and that date marks for us the beginning of a new time-frame, a new age, in the history of the world. And since our faith dominated Europe, our Christian dating of time became the western world's way of dating time. We live in the year 2018, which is the two thousand and 18th year since the birth of Jesus. Until recently this fact has been recognized by adding the letters AD to the year, two letters which stand for the Latin words *anno domini*, which mean "the year of the Lord." Or we use the letters BC to stand for "Before Christ." However, because we are now conscious of the fact that non-Christians also live in our western culture, the letters AD and BC have been replaced by many with the letters CE and BCE, which stand for "The Common Era" and "Before the Common Era." If you go to The Museum of Fine Arts, you will see that these letters are used there. Even many Christian writers use them because they know that their works will be read by non-Christians.

During this season of Advent, that is, the coming of the Lord, the Gospels for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sundays focus in on John the Baptist. Why? Because John symbolizes the time before the Lord's

coming. He prepares the way of the Lord. When the Lord finally comes, then a new age has begun. We are then in AD time, the years of the Lord. Before that, in John's time, we are in BC time, the time before Christ. The gospels therefore often contrast and compare John and the Lord. JB is the preparer, Jesus the fulfiller. John is the stern one fasting and living in the desert; Jesus comes feasting and living among the people.

But despite this study in contrasts the Gospels also present us with some commonalities between the Lord and John. For instance, in today's Gospel we are told that John preached good news to the people. Therefore he is anticipating the Lord's own message. And John's answers to those who question him would seem to correspond to what the Lord himself would have said if he had been presented with the same questions. For John tells his questioners to do what life demands of them now. If you have two cloaks and someone has none, give him your second cloak, he tells his hearers in today's Gospel. If you are a tax collector, don't collect more than what is prescribed. And if you are a soldier, don't extort money from people or accuse them of crimes falsely, and be content with your pay. In short, whatever you do, do well. Does that not sound like the Lord himself?

We have to be who we should be, we have to do what we should do, and life tells us who we should be and what we should do.

There is a Latin phrase which says, “age quod agis,” which translated means, “do what you are doing.” Is that not pretty much what John is saying to the tax collectors and soldiers in today’s gospel? Just be who you should be as a good tax collector or as a good soldier or as somebody who has an extra coat and sees someone who doesn’t have even one.

Could that be a message for us this third Sunday of Advent? Do what you are doing. Be who you are supposed to be. May we be good wives and husbands! May we be good parents! May we be good sons and daughters! May we be good sisters and brothers! May we be good grandparents! May we be good citizens! May we be good officials! May we be good friends! May we be good Catholics! If we do that, then we, like John, will be preaching Good News to our world. Then, like him, we will be preparing the way of the Lord. Amen.