

Rorate Coeli, The Fourth Sunday in Advent, A²D 2010

John 1:19-28

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 If your hopes are for things temporary, you will be disappointed eternally. If your hopes are for things eternal, you may be temporarily disappointed, but you will be eternally satisfied. So, what are your hopes? What are the things that occupy your daydreams and fantasies? A better job, more money, cars that work? Success for your children, a more attractive wife or a mistress on the side, respect from your peers? More sleep, more time to exercise, more freedom? If these are the sum of your hopes, you may realize your hopes now, but those things do not last, and in the life to come these hoped-for things will not endure. Advent exists to correct your hopes, to give you better things to hope for and a more certain hope.

2 John the Baptist is the Advent guy. He shows up in the Liturgy, as the Proper Preface declares of Jesus, "Whose way John the Baptist prepared," before he appears in the readings on the Third and Fourth Sundays in Advent. Like the whole season of Advent, John exists to call you up to a higher hope. His very presence in the wilderness is the first of his preaching. He doesn't preach normally, from the usual locus of preaching, from the synagogues. He preaches out in the wilderness. Out to the wilderness, the representatives of the priests and Levites came to ask him, "Who are you, John?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John didn't say anything about himself. That was part of the problem. But the prophet Isaiah had spoken of John centuries earlier. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

3 In leaving the comfort of the cities and town, in calling to repentance all who hear his message, John calls you out into the wilderness, as well. John calls you away from the place of civilized sinners, away from the place where your life can be found in your job, your family, your possessions, away from the place where death masquerades as life, where the person who is "living it up" has made pleasure into a god, where a person may die having lived a "full life" without ever having been baptized. John calls you away from where sin has become civilized and where sin turns its captives into seemingly civilized savages.

4 John preaches in the wilderness to give you hope in the wilderness. His message is simple: This is not your home. This is the wilderness before the Promised Land, the exile before the return to the homeland, the time of waiting before the future is realized. John prepares for the coming of the Christ, both for His first advent and for His second Advent. He does so by drawing your hopes away from the things of civilization, the things of Jerusalem, the things of this temporary life to hope in things eternal.

5 Don't get distracted. Don't let your hopes settle on things that cannot satisfy. You are created for something better, something better, something eternal. You have been redeemed from sin and death by the death of Jesus on the cross to have a certain hope, a solid confidence that when He returns, He will raise you to eternal life and give you blessings that will endure forever. You were not created to be satisfied with this broken world. You have an internally engrained longing for the eternal. Repent of thinking that the world can satisfy you; repent of hoping more for temporary comfort than for eternal satisfaction; repent of seeking pleasures now that distract you from the eternal sources of life and pleasure: God's Word and Sacraments.

6 This world is not your home, but God has not left you homeless. The Son of God descended from His royal throne, left His eternal home, in order to bring you home. Jesus left His home so that you might have a royal homecoming. Even when God exiled Adam and Even from their home in the Garden of Eden, He did so in order that they might not remain in the garden in a fallen, corrupted state, but that He might recreate them, delivering them from their sin and death. Jesus came to the wilderness of a fallen creation, to die on the cross in the wilderness outside Jerusalem, in order to bring you out of that wilderness to the Promised Land of paradise with Him.

7 You are not of this world, not of this age. God's children, adopted through Holy Baptism, are people of a different time and place. You are people of the future, those whose future is guaranteed, sealed in Christ. In Him all your hopes are fulfilled. Even your false, short-sighted hopes are fulfilled in Jesus. Your false hopes, after all, are just true hopes distorted. Your hope for healing, for relief from pain, is fulfilled in Jesus who will heal you completely and perfectly when He raises you from the dead. Your hopes for riches are fulfilled in Jesus who has stored up for you an eternal inheritance, heavenly treasures beyond any earthly comparison. Your hope for companionship, for company, is fulfilled in Jesus who gathers you with Himself, with the Holy Trinity, with the whole company of His elect throughout the ages, on the Day of His return.

8 Until that day, until the future is realized, Christ's Church is a colony of the future. She has a hope that cannot exist anywhere else. She knows the future. She lives the future. She is composed of people of the future, living as an outpost in the present, awaiting the Day of Her Lord's return. She is sustained with things of the future. Her Lord breaks into the present with gifts of the future every time He forgives her sins, every time He adds to her ranks by baptizing another, every time He gives her a foretaste of the future at His altar. That's what the Lords Supper is—a taste of the future. For an all-too-brief moment, the eternal future intersects with the passing present, as Jesus gives You His Body and Blood, as He feeds you with Himself. Even in the wilderness, Jesus feeds you for the future, feeds you into the future, gives you hope until the future. Take heart, His Second Advent is immanently near. Taste the future at His Holy Supper.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer