

3rd Sunday of Advent (A)
(Isaiah 35:1-6.10 / Matthew 11:2-11)
15.12.2019
Hear & See

In the Bible, ears and eyes are important. In the book of Genesis, the serpent reveals to Eve that, if she eats the fruit of the tree, her “eyes will be opened” (Gn 3:5). In the land of Moab, Moses speaks to the people and warns them that “to this day the Lord has not given you eyes to see, or ears to hear” (Dt 29:4).

In today’s Gospel reading when the disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus to provide proof of his identity, he answers: “Go back and tell John what you hear and see.”

To hear and see are two senses which play a major role in our human lives. At a spiritual level, for the biblical writers, to see what Jesus does and to listen to his words are a summons to believe, to understand and interpret life and the whole of reality from God’s perspective.

More than any other liturgical season, Advent speaks to our eyes and ears. It is about seeing green and red, gold and silver colours, it is about seeing the whiteness of the snow, it is about listening to carols being played all around us. It can all be quite overwhelming, all these sounds and images are powerful by their ability to create a festive atmosphere.

However all these Christmassy colours can blind us, preventing us from seeing what really matters to us, the old tunes may be played so loudly that they can prevent us from hearing the gentle voice of God.

There is within all of us a mysterious awareness that we have lost something of our identity when we left paradise. There is a word we long to hear. Moved by a nostalgia for the vision of God, longing for an intimate connection with him, we may be stopped short by the festive atmosphere and end up satisfying ourselves with what is superficial, sparkling and glittery.

For us Christians, beyond all the colours, we have to see a light which is humble and poor and to hear, above all the clamour, a voice which is discreet and unassuming. In fact what is given to us to hear and see can be heard and seen in truth only if we connect with our deepest desire for God and dive deep below the surface in order to reach what is really at stake: life, true life, plenitude of life.

In our Gospel reading, what is striking is that an ability to see and hear is required if we want to recognise Jesus as Lord. When questioned about his identity, Jesus does not advise John the Baptist’s disciples to read the Torah, or the Catechism of the Catholic Church or to google the Vatican website. He invites them to look at and to listen to those whose lives he has impacted, challenged and transformed. These people are his credentials and his message. Christ reveals himself for who he is in all that he does, especially in and through the lives of others.

It is an amazing act of humility on God’s behalf that, in Jesus Christ, he chooses to depend on us as heralds of his identity! We have a huge responsibility. Our deeds, our words, the way we deal with our own gifts and weaknesses and the way we relate to others in their poverty and riches, the way we vote and use our money, what we do with our intelligence and sexuality, in short everything we are and have is supposed to be a message from God addressed to all those we meet.

Before becoming a great theologian and a cardinal, while still a young French Dominican, Yves-Marie Congar chose for motto a phrase from St Hilary of Poitiers: "For my own part, I know that the chief duty of my life is that all that I say and all that I feel speaks of God." We would do well to make our own this statement because, as our Gospel reading today reminds us, the Lord has chosen us to be his witnesses. "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2Co 5:20), his spokespersons.

Because we are poor and limited, inevitably there are some interferences in the message we send, our lives are not clearly written parchments easy to read.

People will always have to decipher and discern what is from God and what is not from God in our lives. Yet we have to be vigilant that what people hear and see is not in complete contradiction with the Gospel and its values. As we read in the prophet Ezekiel, it is through us that the Lord wants to display his holiness in the eyes of all the nations (cf. 36:23).

The coming weeks are marked by highly challenging contrasts: there are people around who have little or nothing and there are those with plenty who are caught up in the Christmas shopping frenzy. While some exchange gifts and good wishes many will experience loneliness. While we sing of peace, there are many men, women and children who are living in countries at war. It is in this context that God decides to reveal who he truly is in a child born of homeless parents.

Let us be careful not to reduce the Child Jesus to a sweet little baby. The child in the manger is meant to present a challenge to the way we live and think. Unfortunately we may decide not to hear and not to see, we may choose to ignore the call to go deeper into our hearts and remain at the surface. We may be so busy that we are unable to really see and hear what is given to us or what is said to us.

In the coming celebration of Christmas we will celebrate a Child who is the Word of God, a word from God which is addressed to each one of us. He is also light from Light. May we prepare our ears and our eyes in such a way that when he comes we may reflect his light and echo his word to all our brothers and sisters in humanity.