3rd Sunday of Advent (A)
(Isaiah 35:1-6.10 / Matthew 11:2-11)
14.12.2025
"What did you go out to see?"

"What did you go out to see?" Jesus' question to the men and women of his time was very challenging. Jesus knew that these people were looking without seeing and hearing without listening. They were so stuck in what they thought a prophet should look like and say that they were unable to welcome John the Baptist as the herald of the Messiah.

The same question is addressed to each one of us today because we are prompt to imitate Jesus' contemporaries.

This question is very relevant to us because we live in a world where we tend to narrow our field of vision and our ability to listen so that everything that comes our way is filtered to fit our small expectations. Recent studies on the content of media platforms show that we all listen to the podcasts which confirm our opinions, look at videos with which we already agree and connect with people who think like us.

In a world wherein we are bombarded with words and images, and encouraged by the social media algorithm, we find our security and comfort in sameness and uniformity.

As Churches we have to be careful because we are not immune to this ghetto mentality. We must not create Christian communities where we are no longer challenged and forget that the Word of God, all our sacraments and rituals call us to conversion, to change, to grow in our love of God and of one another. Recently Pope Leo challenged us all when he declared: uniformity is an impoverishment. "Indeed, a society is alive if it has a plurality (…). Yet today, human communities are increasingly polarized and torn apart by extreme positions that fragment them." (*Address*, 27.11.2025)

So for us the questions are: what do we choose to look at? What do we choose to listen to? Are we stuck in an impoverished mental or social ghetto?

The Presbyterian theologian Ruth Page wrote: "Men and women exist as selves in relation to others, not merely in isolation." Herein lies the challenge for all of us. If we want to know the joy promised by the prophet Isaiah in our first reading, we need to go beyond our small wounded and fearful ego prone to wrap itself in its dignity and to refuse to connect with others in truth and be open to new challenging relationships, new dialogues, new horizons, new words which will reveal what life and love are really about.

The Christmas season which draws near will be for many – unfortunately not for all – a time for fellowship, the exchange of gifts and good meals. As we give thanks for all that, we have to remember that the prophetic ministry confided to each one of us is to announce a joy which is more real and lasting, and certainly stronger when we make our way through difficult times: it is the joy of knowing Christ, the joy of seeing and hearing him in the vulnerability and limitations of a Child in a manger, and then in all our brothers and sisters in humanity, particularly those with whom we live.

If we really decide to look at the Child for who he really is, if we make the effort to listen to what he is saying to us about his and our Father, then we cannot remain blind to the sufferings of so many children, women and men, near and far; then we cannot shut our ears to the cries of those around us who feel discriminated against and rejected; then we cannot be so self-obsessed and self-satisfied that we can feel unconcerned by what is happening in Ukraine, Gaza, South Sudan, and in the many, too many, refugee camps in Bangladesh, Kenya or Jordan.

It is only when we enter into a dynamic of personal and communal openness to others and a real commitment to the common good that, while still "the least in the kingdom of heaven," we can be greater than John the Baptist.

In order for us to become great we have to allow Christ to grow to his full stature within us (cf. Eph 4:13).

In our countries and Churches, the measure of our greatness is love. A love which spurs us on to give of ourselves generously so that all weary hands may be strengthened, all trembling knees may be steadied, and all faint hearts be encouraged.

Our duty to care for the poor, the needy and the oppressed, for all those who, in one way or another, are not respected is part of our prophetic ministry today.

In 1933, as the Nazis arrived in power in Germany, the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community." This might mean "not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to jam a spoke in the wheel itself." (De Gruchy, p. 127) After a long imprisonment for his participation in a plot to assassinate Hitler, the Nazis killed Bonhoeffer in 1945.

Unlike St John the Baptist, Bonhoeffer and many others throughout the centuries and in our own time, we do not risk of being killed for our faith, for standing up for justice and freedom, for jamming a spoke in the wheel of all the political decisions which do not respect human dignity. While that is so, let us remember that we are not supposed to look at the world like bystanders and spectators, we are called to be a light in the darkness, a voice in the wilderness.

May the Lord restore in us his way of seeing with love and hope so that together with all men and women we may beat swords into ploughshares and make straight the paths that lead to peace (cf. Is 2:4).

Come Lord to make all things new! (cf. Is 43:19)