

Advent IV

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[0 : 00] I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. The words from this morning is the Holy Gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. The messengers are different, but the message is the same. The Gospel lesson states St. John Baptist emphatically told the priests and Levites, I am not the Christ.

And yet, as St. Matthew's Gospel teaches us, the message John proclaimed and the message Jesus proclaimed were the same. In St. Matthew chapter 3 verse 2, John proclaimed, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And in St. Matthew chapter 4 verse 17, we are told Jesus also proclaimed, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

St. Peter was a follower of Jesus, whom Jesus appointed to be primus inter paribus, meaning the first among equals in the apostolic college.

[1 : 16] As an apostle, Peter was appointed to preach the message Jesus has taught his disciples during his earthly ministry. What was that message?

Acts 2.38 tells us, St. John Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Peter, St. John Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Peter, different messengers with the same message.

Why is this? John was the last of the Old Covenant prophets.

St. Luke chapter 1 verse 17 states, He came in the spirit and power of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. He was beheaded for declaring the coming of the kingdom.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He not only proclaimed the way of the kingdom, he is the way of the kingdom. He suffered and died upon the cross.

[2 : 50] He arose and ascended to establish that kingdom. Peter and the other apostles were Jesus' chosen witnesses, the first men commissioned to go into all the world and preach to every creature.

They were martyred for the glory of that kingdom. You and I are called to be this generation's witnesses, crying out the truth of the gospel in the wilderness to this faithless generation.

As we are effective, we too will suffer consequences for it. Maybe even more so in Advent than any other time of year, the door is open to us to proclaim the message of repentance and the kingdom.

In Advent, the world is getting ready for Christmas, and even non-religious people are very aware that Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth.

But we must be aware we don't become blinded by the world's interpretation of Jesus' birth. We must not get caught up in the commercialized and hallmark versions of this feast.

[4 : 03] We must remain focused on the truth that Jesus was born to establish a kingdom. And only those who repent and receive the gospel can be its citizens.

Even if we miss this opportunity in Advent, the door to share the message of repentance and the kingdom is always open to us. If we are willing, we can share the message, the same message, St. John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ, and St. Peter declared, the message of the kingdom of God.

But we must have courage. We must be bold. We cannot shrink back. The circumstances the Christians whom St. Peter wrote his two epistles to parallel the circumstances many Christians face today.

Conditions you and I may be facing very soon. Woven within these two epistles, St. Paul addresses the trying of our faith, the necessary suffering faithful Christians must endure, and the sobriety and vigilance we must live with as we proclaim the message of repentance and the kingdom of God in the world that we live in.

A good summary of those circumstances is given in 1 Peter 4, verses 12 and 13. St. Peter writes, Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

[5 : 42] But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Peter says we should not be surprised by the trials and even the sufferings that we must face as we share the message of repentance and Christ's kingdom in this world.

Instead, he says, we are to rejoice. As this morning's epistle states it, rejoice in the Lord always. Why? Because the Lord is at hand. Jesus is coming again. His second advent is imminent. The day and the hour are already known by the Father.

And we are blessed to be members of Christ's kingdom by baptism and to share in his life by the Eucharist and penance today. By enduring the trials and the sufferings necessary to bring the message of repentance and Christ's kingdom to others, we stretch toward the goal of the Christian life to be one with Jesus in life, in death, and in resurrection.

[7 : 03] As St. Paul states in Philippians 3, verses 10 and 11, the goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformed to his death, if by any means we may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.

St. Peter's epistles not only teach us the circumstances we face, they teach us the right strategy to use in proclaiming the message of repentance and Christ's kingdom to others.

Despite the fiery trials we will and we do face. Two passages sum that strategy up well. The first is 1 Peter 2, verses 11 and 12, where Peter says, Beloved, I beg you, as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, meaning those who do not believe, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We proclaim the message of repentance and Christ's kingdom best through living a sanctified life amongst and in the midst of those who do not believe.

People today are looking for a life testimony for Christ more than a verbal testimony. Our video needs to match our audio. Do we abstain from fleshly lusts?

[8 : 44] Or do we just say we do? Is our conduct truly honorable? Or do we talk about it but don't live it? And second, as we live the message of repentance in Christ's kingdom in our daily lives, 1 Peter 3, verse 15 tells us what else we are to do.

Always be ready to give a defense, to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

As we live lives of repentance and faithfulness, people will see it. They will. And when they do, they will ask, why do you live this way?

When they do ask, we must be ready and willing to meekly, yet boldly, tell them. So yes, the messengers are different.

John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ, Peter and the Twelve, you and I today. But the message is one. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[9 : 59] As members of Christ's one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church, our Lord has commissioned us to bring this one message to the world that we live in.

In spite of the trials, the resistance, and the persecution we may face. In these last few days of Advent through Christmas and every day after, may we proclaim this message to everyone our Lord leads us to with humility and boldness as messengers crying out in the wilderness of this age. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.