

## **“Expect so much more!” Matthew 11:2-11**

“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, “‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Do you ever have doubts about this God of the Bible? Do you ever have doubts about Jesus? Is He the One? Is He the answer? Is He the ultimate solution? Why does the world look like someone else is running it and not the benevolent and all-powerful God?

Why did your loved one get that terrible terminal disease? Why did this Christian teenager get squeezed under the tractor? Why did that lovely Christian couple keep losing all their children after just a few months of pregnancy?

Why did this wonderful Seminary professor get divorced? Why did those toxic people make your life like hell, with their abuse and violence, and without any obvious reason? We can go on and on with our questions... Health afflictions, relationship tragedies, financial challenges, abuse, injustice, misery upon misery upon misery. Where is God?!

Where are you, Jesus?! Do you ever have any doubts? It looks like John the Baptist did... He was in prison, he heard about what Jesus was doing, and he sent his disciples to ask this question: **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”**

Today's Gospel reading provides rich material for our reflections. To help us to understand what was going on and what it means for us, we could reflect on these questions. **Was John expecting too much from Jesus? What was it that Jesus had come to deliver? And what does this mean for us?**

**Was John expecting too much from Jesus?** There have been two different understandings in the Church's history about John's inquiry. Some argue that John could not have possibly doubted Jesus' identity.

They were relatives. Their mothers Elizabeth and Mary were in conversation about what God was doing though them even before John or Jesus were born. What happened with them and what will happen with their two sons, that would be on their minds every day.

John had begun his ministry preparing the way for the One to come, for someone whose sandals he wasn't worthy to untie. He baptized Jesus. He saw the Holy Spirit descending on Him, just as God had promised the sign.

He stretched his hand pointing to Jesus: "**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" He had declared: "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" (John 1:29, 3:30) How could He doubt Jesus' identity? But that's what the text tells us.

But then again, John was in prison. Arrested for preaching. Meanwhile Jesus was out there. Traveling from town to town. Teaching, preaching, healing, enjoying people's favor, feasting with sinners, having a good time. While John was in prison.

And Jesus hadn't moved a finger to change that. "Are you the Son of David? Are you our long-awaited Messianic King? Will you finally defeat all our enemies and bring justice to everyone and usher in the age of peace? For that is why you came, didn't you?"

None of that was happening, at least not as far as John and his disciples could see it. Was John expecting too much from Jesus? Was Jesus too weak to deliver on those promises? Too little a savior? Was He too limited in what He could do?

One thing that we can learn for our comfort is this. If you sometimes have doubts about what God is doing, or is He doing anything at all, or perhaps that is one of those occasions when He had forgotten about you, know this - you are in a good company.

Abraham doubted, Job doubted, Moses doubted, Habakkuk doubted, Jeremiah doubted. Read Psalms, how many of them question what was happening? And it seems that even John the Baptist doubted Jesus. Were they all expecting too much from God?

**What was it that Jesus had come to deliver?** What is Jesus' response to John?

He simply points to what is happening. "**The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.**" Wow! Can we even picture this?

Jesus is not healing the common cold; He is not relieving some stiffness of neck caused by sitting too long. He is making again complete those who were born [!] with disabilities, blind, lame, deaf, He is cleansing lepers from their deacease, He is raising up the dead! He is reversing the effects of sin! He does it by simply speaking, laying on hands; sometimes He is present, and sometimes He does it from a distance.

What an incredible joy for those who had suffered their whole lives, and now for the first time are made whole! What a joy for those whose loved ones are brought back to life! What is this? Who can do something like that? Are you the One?

Remember our reading from Isaiah 35? How was God's coming described? **"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."** God's coming...

How else would we know that God has visited His people, unless He was going His God's stuff, something that is far beyond anything naturally possible. What Jesus was pointing at, what Jesus was doing, all those unbelievable but undeniable transformations, it all served to reveal who Jesus was. The One who was promised.

He is the One who is the Lord over sickness and health, over creation, over beings and powers visible and invisible, over life and death. Everything is under His authority. But then... Why didn't He deliver what they were hoping; or what we are hoping for?

This is why, and this is important to understand. What was it that Jesus came to deliver? He was the true God. The Almighty in human flesh. He did come to save and to reign. But He didn't come to patch up a few painful areas.

Sure, Jesus did heal and raised the dead and made so many well. But remember, almost always He did it with hesitation, often instructing them to keep it quiet. It was almost like He did it unwillingly. How to make sense of it?

You see, those whom Jesus healed, made well, raised from the dead, what happened with them? They all were still a part of this faller creation. With no escape. And after a while they all... died. Because the wages of sin is death.

Yes, Jesus revealed with His miracles that He was the true God, but He also made it clear that He hadn't come to put some patches on where we were hurting at the moment. John and his disciples were not expecting too much from Jesus.

On the contrary, they were expecting way, way too little. As do we. Isaiah is His vision speaks about God who comes to restore and renew His entire creation, for it is the whole creation that has been groaning together as it is waiting eagerly for God's redemption.

**"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."**

With His coming among us Jesus revealed that a new age has dawned, that God Himself had come to defeat our ultimate enemies, temporary captors and slave masters of this fallen creation - sin, death and devil, and to launch His eternal Kingdom. Jesus revealed that the Triune God has begun His work of renewal of this whole creation.

This is what Jesus came to deliver. John and his disciples struggled to grasp the enormity of what was happening, as do we even today. What God was doing in Jesus is just too much for us to comprehend. For now. But that is going to change soon.

That's why He said: **"Blessed is the one who is not offended by me."** In other words, blessed are you who are not expecting too little from me, blessed are you who are not offended by the message that the man Jesus will renew the whole creation, blessed are you who begin to grasp the magnitude of what Jesus has done for you!

Our last question was - **what does this mean for us?** We won't get it, not really, but I will still say it anyway. From Jesus' mouth: **"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."**

John was the one repeatedly announced by the prophets centuries before he was born. It was in the fullness of time when he was sent to prepare the way for the Lord of Creation. Those who witnessed John's ministry witnessed the fulfilment of God's promises. John stretched His hand: **"Behold, the Lamb of God!"** John was a unique messenger, handpicked by the Almighty Himself, greater than anyone born of women.

But... you are greater than John. Yes, you! You are! Each one of you, who have been registered as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven in your baptism. You have received the gift of God's own Spirit, He dwells in you and He **"is the guarantee of your inheritance until you acquire possession of it, to the praise of God's glory"**. (Eph 1:14)

We expect too little; way too little from Jesus. Sure, He hears our prayers, He is in anguish as we suffer tragedies of this life, He knows how we feel, He knows our pain, He has been there and experience it more than we ever will and often He intervenes and we are left speechless and vexed to explain what happened. But we expect too little.

He, the Eternal Son of the Father, the firstborn of all creation, in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily, He came to bring you into His Kingdom. Yes, He knows what we are like, yes, He knows we don't deserve it, yes, He knows how ungrateful and of little faith we are. But He sees you for who He will make you.

When His work with you is done, you will be His glory. Amazing, adorable, magnificent eternal beings, far beyond that which we can even dream about. And even the least in the Kingdom of heaven are far greater than John.

Brothers and sisters, when the next time comes when you may doubt our Father and our Lord Jesus, remember, we doubt for we expect too little. We expect patches for our wounds that won't last, we expect fixes for our lives that are perishing.

Meanwhile, **"what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, [that is what] God has prepared for those who love Him"**. For you, dear Saints! Don't be offended if your will doesn't happen, if God doesn't deliver what you are hoping for. Expect more, rejoice in Jesus' promises, for you are one of the great ones! Yes, you are!

Amen.