

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

“WHAT SHOULD WE DO?”ⁱ

In response to John the Baptist’s call to repentance, to a change of mind and heart (Lk. 3:3), the crowds asked ‘**What should we do?**’ John provides actions according to the *virtue of justice*.

In the Biblical perspective, justice is paramount. If you wish to be in a right relationship with God, your actions must be inspired by the pursuit of giving what is due to God and neighbor. Let’s listen once again to the words of St John the Baptist. First to the crowd he says:

‘Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.’ (Lk. 3:11)

The social teaching of the Church provides us with a constant reminder: ‘though private property is legitimate and a good [in itself], the *use* of our private property must always have a social orientation.

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, states that man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all and to be used for the common good. He says:

‘When necessity and seemliness have been satisfied, there is a duty to use what is over to relieve the poor.’ Once the basic needs of life have been met, whatever is left over belongs to the poor, not to you!

St John Chrysostom expresses this thought in the following words:

‘If you have two shirts in your closet, one belongs to you, the other belongs to the person who has no shirt.’

Then we hear that the Tax Collectors come to see John. Tax collectors were especially despised in Biblical times, as they were notoriously corrupt in their dealings with money. What does John tell them to do?

‘Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.’ (Lk. 3:13)

John asks the Tax Collectors to be just in their financial dealings with others; to stop using their position and influence to extort money from others. They were asked to be economically just.

Finally, soldiers come to John. What is the constant temptation of a soldier, or one in a position of authority? It is very tempting to use that authority and power to manipulate and dominate others, or to try to obtain money from others. So, John instructs the soldiers:

‘Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.’ (Lk. 3:14)

In reflecting on St. John the Baptist’s words today, each one of us is invited to a deep spiritual renewal in all of our dealings with others; to act justly and honorably in the ordinary circumstances of life.

ⁱ Much of this homily has been taken from Fr. Robert Barron, *A Journey Through Advent: Reflections on the Sunday and Advent Readings Cycle C*, audio CD produced by Lighthouse Catholic Media.