

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent by Ewelina Frackowiak

Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

We live in a post-truth society. You probably saw that statement in the news - maybe made by journalists whose noble profession consisting of painstaking checking of facts seem not to be appreciated anymore. Facts – verified by teams of researchers and reporters - are less influential, people say, than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs. Effect? A deeply divided society south of our border. That division has an impact here. Ten minutes at a Christmas party this season was enough for me to figure out who was there pro-Trump and who was there pro-Clinton.

Today's Gospel offers lessons for us – twenty-first century Christians seeking truth and determined to bring unity to the world, not division.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist, probably confused and discouraged in Herod's prison, sends his disciples to Jesus with a simple question: Are you the Messiah or should we look for another? Note that Jesus does not answer yes or no. He says: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Matthew, 11:4-5). John is invited to make a conclusion for himself, conclusion which will be based on the results of Jesus' action.

First lesson here: in our search for truth, in our search for understanding, let's not simply take what others, even those with authority, say without questioning it. We have to examine everything against our experience, against the facts.

Against the facts... But that is tricky, isn't it? John might have seen Jesus perform the miracles of healing, but we didn't. So, what should we believe in? The thing is – it does not matter. Your beliefs do not matter as much as your love, your attitude, your heart. Let us listen to the second part of Jesus' answer: "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (Matthew 11:6).

We take offense at Jesus every time we take offense at goodness, love and life. Every time we feed the bad wolf of jealousy, aversion or craving in us. According to a Cherokee legend, every human being has a good wolf and a bad wolf in him or her¹. Feeding the bad wolf can become a habit – when we react to emotions without realizing what we do.

¹ An elderly Cherokee was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me, it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf is evil – he is fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, competition, superiority, and ego. The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too. They thought about it for a minute, and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win, Grandfather?" The Elder replied, "The one you feed."

I do not want us to feel bad about ourselves. Every time we feel aggression, jealousy, aversion, craving – we can notice it and rejoice that we are able to pinpoint what is happening and that we are no longer living in ignorance. We can then promise ourselves to practice feeding the good wolf – promise not to react to our emotions and to love oneself and others, because we are all one in Christ. Beating ourselves up and putting ourselves down – that will be another example of taking offense at Christ.

Let me summarize. Let's work on our capacity for love and on keeping our hearts and minds wide-open. This is much more important for our spiritual growth than clinging to a belief. Our beliefs change anyway. Our beliefs MUST change for our faith to grow.

If we put less stress on the beliefs of those with whom we do not agree, it will be easier for us to notice the goodness in people and rejoice in that goodness, won't be?

We can transform the world with our love. Such transformation won't just happen the moment we convince people that we are right, when we succeed in changing them in such way that they will see truth where we see truth and they will see lies where we see lies. Jesus invites us to join him in action, in loving, in healing – no matter what our beliefs are.

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