

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 27th 2013

Feast of St. John, Apostle

As I reflected on today's feast of St. John, and its placement in the Octave of Christmas, I was struck again by the delicate layers of insight the Spirit gives to the Church in our liturgical life. Even before we ponder the poetic proclamation of witness in the first reading, the placing of the feast on the third day of the eight days of celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation tells us a great deal about our lives as disciples. John is often called the "beloved disciple" because he speaks of a "disciple Jesus loved" as one who lays his head on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, and stands with Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. The intimacy of the description seems to be an implied self-description (hence the Church's reference to John as the "Beloved") but another way of reading it, similar to the address of the Luke's Gospel and Acts of the Apostles to one "Theophilus" – or God-lover – can be a general reference about all real disciples, we are, each and all, "Beloved." It is we who in the Eucharist and in other tender moments of prayer lay our head on Christ's shoulder or breast, and we who stand beneath the Cross with our mother, the Church, to receive the instruction to care for and be cared for by her. It is the "role" of a disciple to be beloved, just as it is the role of the disciple to witness to that loving tenderness of God made manifest in the humanity of Jesus Christ, which we celebrate these eight days (the fullness of time and participation in the new creation marked by the number eight).

The witness of the disciple is simply and strikingly presented in the first reading: What we have seen and heard in our own lives we report to you – we share with you. But IF we have seen and heard it in our own lives, then our lives have to demonstrate that. Pope Francis has been calling all Catholics to be "JOYFUL" because IF we have seen and heard the truth of God becoming human in our own lives THEN we must manifest that truth by our attitudes, choices and way of life. What have we seen and heard? In some way or another we have encountered the profound loving care of God's personal attention to us. If that hasn't happened for us, then we must pray in confidence that God will disclose God's self to us, and we have to attentively listen to the soft whisper of God that changes everything – like a mighty wind. The Advent season called us to patience. This Christmas octave calls us to attend – to kneel at the crèche, to place our head on the shoulder or chest of the adult Jesus, to stand listening, longing or even agonizing at the foot of the cross, and to run – as today's Gospel describes it – to run to the tomb, and see the evidence of Resurrection in our life. Where is new life popping up when we least expect it? Where does the evidence of gracious events leave us puzzling about how this could be? Pray with St. John to see how the evidence around corroborates your own experience of God's presence in Jesus.

After Christmas, we would think that the predominate feeling we would have would be gratitude. Grateful at what family or friends or co-workers have provided; grateful for what we have and who we have that love us; grateful, above all for our lives and the goodness of God who has given us so much. I especially speak for myself as I type these words – how can I help rejoicing in the gratitude of all that God has given. But I find a temptation to feel "let down" somehow. A similar feeling came after a big performance years ago when I did some theater or musical performance. But Christmas is not

about performance. Christmas is about receiving the Word-made-flesh into our lives. Maybe if I – (or you?) – don't feel grateful it is because we did not allow ourselves the humility of the disciple to RECEIVE Christ's gracious presence. The great news is that we still have time! We are celebrating only the third day of the octave – five more days to become attentive . . . receptive . . . to Jesus' invitation to intimacy as a real disciple – a beloved disciple. Blessed St. John's Day!

“Oh come let us adore him . . . Christ the Lord ”

Eileen Burke-Sullivan