



Christmas Carroll Eve Mass Homily

December 13, 2008

Who are you?

John 1: 6-8

This may seem like a strange reading for Advent. It is not about the angel coming to the Virgin Mary, or about the angel coming to Joseph and telling him that the prophecies would be fulfilled through Mary's child. It is not even about the angel Gabriel that came to Zechariah and foretold that he would have a son in his old age -- John the Baptist, the man whom our Gospel lesson is about.

Instead, our Gospel reading is about the priests and Levites, the good people in those days, coming out and asking John -- "Who are you?" This is not an unusual question. Most of us have been in a strange situation and been asked: "Where are you from?" Or "what do you do?" Or "what is your major?" People want to get a handle on us -- who we are.

How would you answer that question? Who are you? I hope that, as finals are next week, part of your answer would be: I'm a serious student. Just in case, we will end our service tonight praying for brain power.

I suspect that some of you are already thinking about being home for the holidays and having a chance to unwind. So you might say: I am so Bill and Maggie's son or daughter. Many of us would also add; "I hope that I'm a good person -- at least I try to be!"

Well, we may gain some insight into how to answer the question: Who are you, if we look at John's life. First, John's life was about courage. These good people in Jesus' day did not choose to speak to John at random. They came out because John had been speaking up. He had been telling anyone who would listen: Christ is coming and that people would have to change. They would have to be someone different after He came.

Trying to answer the question, Who am I, might make us decide to change. Some of you were present at graduation last spring and heard our Millor Orator, Tom Herron. As Tom described his Carroll experiences, he told about Christmas his freshman year. He had really enjoyed his fall semester at John Carroll, but it had been about experiencing the college social life -- not necessarily about learning and growing. That year, his grandfather, a man he had been very close to, died. Tom reexamined his life and thought about his grandfather's love of family and of community service. He concluded that he

had to invest himself in his studies and begin to think about how he could be of service to others -- how he could become a person that others would be proud to know.

John also resisted the temptation to let others define him. It must have been tempting. The priest and Levites are somewhat confused about John the Baptist. He has been preaching, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. They asked if he were the great prophet Elijah. He said no. "Well," they said, "if you are not Elijah, are you another wise leader who will guide us -- a Prophet?" He said no. "Well, are you the Christ, the Messiah who will lead us?" Again, he told them no, but these must have been tempting options. If he said yes, they would have brought him followers, more fame, and attention. He did not let them trap him.

Now I doubt, if you or I are going to be mistaken for the prophet Elijah, but I can tell you that all of us have expectations placed on us by others. Think about the expectations that others have placed on you. You know that you don't have to accept them, but you do have to know who you are and who you want to be if you are to reject their expectations.

Our New Testament reading is from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. It is a very positive message. The people in that city were trying to understand what it meant to live as Christians. Paul begins with "rejoice always." Paul reminds them to be careful in their choices, but he also reminds them to be confident: that God will take care of his children.

I am reminded of a Christmas Calvin and Hobbes cartoon. Calvin is hiding behind a tree with a snowball, as his girlfriend walks down the street.

She calls out: "I see you Calvin and you had better not throw that snowball. I'm going to mail a letter to Santa Claus right now."

Calvin asks, "Is the envelope sealed?"

"Yes," she replies. "But I could write a P.S. on the back."

"Do you have a pen?" Calvin asks.

"As a matter of fact, I do." she answers.

Calvin drops the snowball and says, "I'll bet she's bluffing, but this is not the time of year to tempt fate."

Unlike Calvin, maybe this is the time for us to answer the question: "Who am I?" as we prepare our hearts to receive Christ.