

**Monsignor Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on December 13, 2009**  
**Third Sunday of Advent – Liturgical Year C**

A particular atheist was convinced God didn't exist. So one day, he shouted up to heaven, "God, if you're up there (and I don't think you are), tell us what to do." Back comes a voice: "Feed the hungry, work for the little guy, house the homeless." The atheist was quite chagrined. "Just testing," he says. "Me too," comes back the voice.

John the Baptist doesn't waste time in long discussions. He's a man with a mission. Time is running out. He gives rules of thumb: "Two cloaks? Give one away. Extra food? Same thing." John is a real prophet. Like God, he can't stand it when the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. His message is simple: get back on track.

No one likes taxes. Believe it or not, in Jesus' time, they were even heavier and less fair than ours. John speaks to the collectors. Does he tell them to quit in protest? No. He's not requiring unemployment. Just be fair. Enough is enough.

And those soldiers? Probably not Romans. The soldiers here are probably little more than local thugs called in to scare their fellow Jews into compliance with tyranny. "Be content with your pay," John tells them. Why? Because often enough, they used their low wages as an excuse to pillage and pilfer. Again, John speaks God's word to brute force and oppression.

Simple, clear commands. No long-winded theology. No compromise. Do what you must where you are. It seems small, and indeed it is. But imagine: if a hundred corrupt officials began to treat people fairly, it would be something of a revolution.

If John is the prophet of "act where you are", he is also the messenger of "do it now". Don't wait. Don't delay.

Jesus, too, will preach and teach. He'll be more nuanced, more a picture of compassion. But Jesus never backs off John's message. He never softens John's call for justice, fairness, and care for the poor.

Sometimes, we give the impression that being a follower of Christ is lofty and heroic. Today's Advent Gospel has a quite different tale. Jesus came into a grubby, messed-up world. He came to change it. Fine, says John. If you want to be part of the world that's coming, pay attention to clothes, food, and money. Look out for those on the margin. You already have what you need to begin to follow Jesus right here and now. You can follow him today. That's the good news.

Blessed Advent to all.