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Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT
December 10-11, 2011

As we come here on this Third Sunday of Advent, we hear in our gospel account John's response to the Levites and the Pharisees and those who were sent to figure out who he is. Is he the long awaited Messiah, the Christ, who was going to come and save God's people? And John emphatically says "no." He is not the Christ. And then he goes on and he says to these persons, but there is one among you whom you do not recognize who is greater than I am, and I am not even worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.

And as we hear John say, "There is one among you whom you do not recognize," we too hear in our gathering that we do not recognize one in our midst – the Christ, the Savior.

It is a matter of asking ourselves as we look around to the persons to our left and to our right, in front of us, behind us, as we interact with family and friends and co-workers and neighbors and strangers, the question is do we see Christ present?

The season of Advent calls us to an awareness to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. We not only prepare for Christ coming in time, being born in flesh, taking on our humanity, coming as a person who endures suffering and pain, even death, and also resurrection. It is also a time – this season of Advent – that we prepare for Christ coming again in the future when God's kingdom comes to its fulfillment, to its completion. And we ready ourselves and prepare ourselves for that future coming, not knowing when that will be, but a people called to readiness, to always be ready for Christ's coming.

But this season of Advent also calls us to awareness of Christ in our midst. That Christ is present in each one of us, in every person that we encounter, we see Christ. And the question for us – do we really acknowledge that Christ is present in each one? A couple of weeks ago, Deacon Lucio preached about the awareness of Christ the King, and made the comment about Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa couldn't be fooled by Jesus. Couldn't be fooled at all that she saw the face of Christ in every person that she ministered to, and challenged the sisters that came to join her, to do her mission and her work, to see the face of Christ in every person. In the poorest of the poor, to see the face of Christ.

It seems to me then that this Third Sunday of Advent challenges us to be aware of Christ in our midst. Do we truly recognize our Savior present to us? For if we truly believe that Christ is present in each one of us, it does impact, it does have an effect, on how we are with one another. If we truly believe that Jesus dwells in each one of us. If we truly see the face of Christ in each face present in all that we meet, it will have an effect on how we are with each other. That we will hopefully be a people who recognize Christ and will love as Christ loves. That we will see Christ present and forgive as Christ forgives. That we will see that face of Christ in one another

and care and tend to one another as Christ cares and tends for us. It is the awareness of Christ in our midst that truly makes a difference. It helps us to participate in that coming of God's kingdom.

And so as we come here on this Third Sunday of Advent, we are a people called to rejoice, rejoice in the Lord! And we rejoice in Christ present in our midst. The challenge is to believe and see Christ in one another. To allow Christ in turn to transform us as God's people so that we can truly rejoice as we ready ourselves for the coming of God's kingdom.