

## Sunday Homily

**Title** Homily on John's Soul-Searching

**Date:** December 14, 2025

**Sunday:** Third Sunday of Advent (A cycle)

**Scripture:** Matthew 11: 2-11

**By:** Fr. Bob Schmitz

*This symbol [:xxx:] reminds me to repeat the words within the brackets*

**Text:** Last month, I attended the funeral of a person who made some serious mistakes.

Afterwards, people asked how I would have preached the funeral. I said, "Everyone needs a savior!" That's a bedrock truth. Before we believe, we hope. The Incarnation, the cross and resurrection, the creed, the church, the moral code: they are a response to our desire for a savior. This isn't a schmitzism. St. Paul said it in his letter to the Ephesians: "Blessed be God as He chose us in [Christ], *before the foundation of the world*" (Eph. 1:4). And Paul wrote to Timothy: "He saved us and called us to a holy life...*before time began*" (2 Tim. 1:9). Before God created us, God knew everyone desires a savior.

That truth is behind Jesus's answer to John the Baptist. John was in jail, anticipating his martyrdom. Eight chapters earlier, Matthew wrote that John knew Jesus, that they conversed, that John refused to baptize Jesus because he knew Jesus was greater. Jesus asked John to baptize him anyway. John did. Jesus, then, split with John and began his ministry. After the split, King Herod Antipas, the second King Herod in the gospels, King Herod arrested John. The question— "Are you the one who is to come?"— seems strange because John knew Jesus. But it is not so strange if we situate John in humanity, if, in that moment, John realized his need for a savior.

We humans construct our lives around our ideal savior. Today's Gospel offers three different approaches to our attachment. King Herod represents the first. Jesus referred to

Herod when Jesus asked the crowd why they followed John into the desert. Jesus asks about a reed swayed by the wind. Herod used reeds on his coins as symbols of his authority. Jesus added 'swaying in the wind' because Herod bent to the whims of the Roman overlords. The people with expensive clothing who lived in palaces were the priests and religious leaders, the scribes and the intellectual leaders. They had sold their souls to Roman power, their idol. The people who opted for Herod thought this-worldly power could save them. Their choice meant they might get rich, but they also had to live with the ways of power, with intimidation, manipulation, and lies. Worst of all, they had to accept violence. The people who went into the desert had enough.

So, they went out to John who represents one of two types of religious savior. We heard some of his preaching last weekend. He was tough, a hellfire and brimstone preacher. John may have taken his cue from the prophet Malachi. When the Messiah comes, Malachi asks "Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand firm when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like a fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying" (Malachi 3:2/3). John's preaching echoes Malachi. John preached tough love, judgment, an arduous piety. John demanded conversion. He would exclude those who did not measure up.

Two thousand years later, the Baptist still has followers. Even today, 60,000 to 100,000 souls follow John; they are called Mandaeans. For most of history, Mandaeans lived in Iran and Iraq; now, they've spread to places that enjoy religious freedom. But, my friends, we all know some Christians who want the same as John: a strict, exclusive religion. They want congregations of the like-minded, everyone living similar lifestyles. They sit in judgment, reveling in purifying fires. John is one type of religious savior.

Jesus is another. Listen to his response to John's questions. "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, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." Many of those diseases would have excluded the ill from society, including banishment from their own homes. Jesus was a Messiah who heals, who lifts up the lowly, who includes the excluded, who forgives the sinner. He feeds the hungry, finds homes for the homeless; he comforts, and he offers rest for the weary.

Jesus took his cue from the prophet Isaiah who creates evocative images of salvation. One celebrates life. Isaiah writes of grand feast for ALL people on a mountaintop, with rich food and fine wine. Another offers help for those in need, "You [God] have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress [: shelter from the rain, shade from the heat:]."

My friends, all people need a savior. Please take care in your search for one. We can turn in many directions. Please know this: your ideal savior will define how you navigate this world and will determine how you relate to others. It comes to this: the salvation we hope for will define the life we live. In a few moments, you receive the Lord in the Eucharist. I pray your *Amen* means you opt for the Savior who includes, who lifts up, who understands, who comforts and heals. I pray your *Amen* means you are responding to God's plan formed before creation.