



Sermon for December 16th, 2012: The Third Sunday of Advent
Fr Michael Kerouac

The Gospel that was appointed for this morning is taken from St. Matthew, and it's about St. John the Baptist. St. John is in prison, he is facing his execution, and he is having his dark night of the soul. He sends two of his disciples to find Jesus and to ask him, "Are You the one, or should we search for another?" And Jesus says, "Go tell John again these things that you do hear and see. The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is preached to the poor." In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I'm going to get back to St. John the Baptist in a minute, but I'm going to get there in a round about way. My son, Remi, is 23 and is living with us this year while working as a waiter in a restaurant. He came to me on Thursday night, and he was distraught. Two of his co-workers who profess to be atheists were attacking his faith, and when he came home he was worried that he hadn't been strong enough, that he hadn't been vibrant and robust enough in the defense of his faith. He didn't know exactly what to say to these two people who professed to be atheists.

Of course, their argument is the argument we hear all the time: How can we believe in a loving God in a world where terrible and tragic things happen?

On Friday, the worst fears that we can have were realized, and so for Remi and for all of us it becomes important for us to be able to answer that question. How is it that we can believe in a loving God in a world where things like Friday's tragedy in Connecticut happen?

First, we have to understand why we're here and what this world is. Looking around, most of you are old enough to have had teenagers. Right? The scariest day of your life is the day you hand the keys to the car to your teenager to drive away on his own. And with the key, he's going to turn on something that could do terrible damage to himself, could do terrible damage to other people, and yet because you love him or her, you still give them that key, and you give them that space, and you pray that they make good decisions.

This world is very much God handing us, as teenagers, the keys. He then gives to us, because He loves us. He gives us real choice, freedom, free will. In order for there to be free will, there has to be a space where the consequences of the bad choices can be played out -- not because He wants us to suffer, but because He wants us to learn the consequences of depending on ourselves, on depending on man, on depending on a

history of man that runs from Cain killing Abel to the tragedies of Friday in Connecticut. This tragedy is what happens when we take control of our lives ourselves.

Of course, we also have the other example, the example of a life of living God's will. We have our families, we have our congregations, we have our communities, we have all of those people that we love. And from their love, and especially from a family's love, we learn how we can be loved by the Father, and we learn that there is another way, that there is a better way. He wants us to learn from that experience to choose life, to choose to live, to live forever in the Kingdom that is to come, in the Kingdom that the season of Advent prepares us for.

What happened on Friday? **We** know what happened on Friday. Regardless of what the details are from the papers, there are things that we know. We know that the moment those children were confronted, that they were wrapped in angels' wings, and they were comforted through their transition. We know that when they got to the other side, they met Jesus Christ -- someone who also had been murdered -- so that when He consoled them, He could tell them exactly that that He knew how it felt, and He could give them comfort immediately. And most important, He gave them knowledge of **why** they died that day. And that's what we also have to visit -- why those children died that day. They know, and over the next years or decades we're going to learn as well.

Here's the truth. The truth is, as those children went to Heaven, family members, parents, brothers and sisters, friends that survived, the first responders that went into that building, that whole community, and in a very powerful way, the whole world, were forced to see this world for what it is and to go and try to make sense of what happened. And in trying to make sense of what happened, those children are going to deliver a whole string of souls to eternal life.

Where can we find sense to this world? Those two atheists that harassed my son, what's their answer? That those children are just more rats, trapped in a maze that is just dancing from one destruction to another until it is their turn to die, and then there's nothing. And yet, our hearts tell us that's a lie. Our souls tell us that's a lie. That can't possibly be true, or we couldn't be so sad for them.

Is Islam the answer? Do we go ahead and kill the children of the people who kill our children, and then be killed because we killed their children, and then turn that in an endless cycle of the 1500 years of the Middle East? Is that the answer? Is that how we make sense of this world? That can't be it.

Most cruelty, and so easily accepted in the United States, is the eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Hinduism where they say, "That's OK, everybody is going to be reincarnated. It'll just come out in the wash eventually." It makes the people who gave their lives and the people who took the lives equal. All of tragedy is of no concern because eventually you're going to live all these lives, killers and killed, until those lives are so mind-numbing that you give up being attached to this world and you dissolve your oneness to God, leaving behind not only all your pain, but all your love. That's a

terrible way for the world to be constructed. And we know that's not the way it was constructed either.

We know the only way that makes sense is that we still love those children and that they're still alive. We still love the people that went before us, and they are still alive. This is a world of life leading to life. That makes sense. A loving God who knows us and who shares our families with us, and our friends with us, and our communities with us, so that we will know how to love each other, and by loving each other we'll begin to learn how to love Him, so that when the world comes -- the world to come, the end of the world that establishes a New Kingdom -- that when we get to that world, we will be prepared for love -- beautifully and perfectly -- and for eternal life.

At the end of that Gospel passage about St. John, Jesus says to the people, who did you come out and see? A prophet? Not just a prophet, John is Isaiah, who was promised to come before the Messiah. But then He says something odd. "And yet, and yet the least of the saints is greater than him." And I've always struggled with that. How can you and I, as we struggle to get in the side door of Heaven, the back door, with as little attention on us as we can get, how could we be greater than St. John the Baptist?

And the answer is in what just happened. St. John the Baptist, as great as he was, did not witness the Resurrection. He could not witness the life to come. He could still preach judgment, he could preach vengeance, he could preach repentance, but he couldn't preach reconciliation, he couldn't preach reunion, he couldn't preach the life to come with the certainty that we would be able to be with the people we love in the life of God.

In the Epistle that was appointed for this morning, St. Paul tells us that we will be judged as ministers of Christ. And as you walk out these doors, back into the world, there will be atheists, there will be agnostics, there will be Buddhists, and there will be every kind of weird philosophy in the world that will be trying to make sense of what happened. And we have to be prepared. We have to be able to bear witness that no matter how terrible that was, there is a loving God who will make what was terrible, wonderful. That will take the tragedy, and from it will bring good. God's will for us, no matter how badly we screw up, will not be confounded. No matter how terrible we treat each other, he will bring good from it. And what He's going to bring He's going to bring hundreds, even thousands of souls to Heaven.

He changed my life this week. I went and tried to hug my son, my 23-year-old son. You know my 23 year old, my 25 year old, my 35 year old, they live in a toxic world. A terrible toxic world, full of danger, full of sadness and hatred and violence, and we need to hug those 20- and 30-somethings because they're now engaged on a very difficult path. They need our love, and they need our hands on them. And, of course, we need to hug their children and remember that our time in this world with them could be short. So we need to prepare them, love them, and show them our faith, so that they go and we go with them to the world to come.

So when we leave here, what do we witness? We witness that this is not a story of death, it is a story of life to come. This is a story of children who are consoled, who are healed, and who are bringing other people to Heaven with them. It's about where we should all be going -- into the life of God, the love of God, into the place where those children found their answers, and where they call to us to find our answers, to rejoin them, to be with them forever.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.