

Become Reconcilers and Intermediaries Third Sunday of Advent/A December 11, 2016
9:00 AM Us 35:1-6, 10; Jas 5:7-10; **Mt 11:2-11** (Jesus wants it to change the way
we think about God and the way we think about what we should be and who we should be.)

“Blessed is he who takes no offence at me.”

That’s actually a strange statement, and very often we hear things in Scripture, especially the gospels, and we let them go; they don’t connect to anything in particular. So why did Jesus say this: “Blessed is he who takes no offense at me”? **Who would be offended** by someone who is giving sight to the blind and restoring the lame to locomotion and preaching good news to the poor? Who would be offended by that? Well, the answer is **maybe John the Baptist**.

This is all about John and his messengers and Jesus speaking with them in a way that was conciliatory, inviting. **John was not a tolerant man**. He was filled with anger, and he thought of God as full of anger, as do many religious people. After all, God is good, but the world isn’t good. **The world is full of evil and wickedness, so God must be angry**. That is very ordinary logic. In fact what Jesus called the “kingdom of God,” John called the “wrath of God.” But **Jesus**, who knew God in an extraordinarily intimate way and claimed to, **never found any anger in the Father** and never spoke of him ever as wrathful, even though there was lots of precedent in the Scriptures—a lot of it. Read the so-called Old Testament—but not Jesus.

And this is a very important point to make and the point he is making with the representatives of John the Baptist. If there was nothing totally radically different about Jesus’ message, there would have been no need for him. **If the New Testament were not radically different from the Old, there would be no need for it**. It would be superfluous. This is part of this whole discussion. **Jesus and his cousin John had two very different perceptions of God**. And so Jesus now is saying, well, “You go tell John what you see: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the poor have the good news preached to them.” These signs are the hallmark of Jesus’ mission and ministry. **But he doesn’t want John to take offence because they are really different**.

He wants to call John along, as he is always doing for all of us. **He wants to bring people along to see a new face of God**. He wants us to think about who we think God is and to

reconsider due to his influence, due to Jesus' influence. He wants it to **change the way we think about God and the way we think about what we should be and who we should be.** And he knows that the gentleness and the mercy and the generosity that he is demonstrating in his life and ministry **might actually be offensive to the rigorous message of John the Baptist,** who after all even asked the Pharisees, "Who told you to flee from the wrath to come?" That's not very generous; it's very righteous. So we are now at the very core of Jesus' reason for being, reason for coming. It is to show us all a new face of God and to **unveil for us God's actual plans for us.** We cannot deduce that from what's going on around us. **We can only find that in him, in the work of Jesus itself.**

So now the gospel of Jesus Christ is calling on all of us to **reconsider who we think God is and what God is like.** And we have to admit there is something natural and attractive about the judgmental attitude toward enemies and adversaries expressed by John the Baptist and many of the prophets and many people in the world. It is attractive. It would be nice to see all those **evil people** punished, and for all we know eventually they will be. But the point is meanwhile **God is working to change them.** It's hard for us to learn this new way of looking at God. Jesus' actions speak louder than words of compassion and mercy. But this is **a compassion and a mercy not only for us but for our adversaries, for our enemies: personal, collective, and national.** **That's hard to learn.**

The God that Jesus reveals to us does not play favorites. That's why it's quite pointless to pray for Notre Dame or any other team. God doesn't play favorites. You can pray for the well-being of all the players, but not for victory. That isn't the way God does things. **In this world as God created it everyone is blessed and yet everyone suffers**—no one excluded. The rain falls on the deserving and the undeserving; the sun shines on the good and the bad. **The more we stray from the right path, the more anxious God is to get us back.** That is actually the way God is and that is actually the way the world is. And you won't learn this from any source except Jesus Christ. **The more we are with him and the more we get onto God's wavelength, the more we have to become reconcilers and intermediaries,** bringing people together, offering hope, presenting a second chance. The more we do that, the more we are filled with peace and joy. And that's what this liturgy is about.