

2nd Sunday of Advent (Divine Spirit vs. Diabolical)

“When John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to Him: *Art Thou He that are to come, or look we for another?*”

1. This is an Advent Gospel because we are looking for this very same Christ to come again and we will need a St. John the Baptist to find Him... He told us to be wary as many will come claiming to be He.
2. Yet, in pondering this Gospel, we can ask what is going on here? Is the greatest prophet born of woman ignorant... or doubting that His Majesty, Jesus the Christ, might not be the one promised to come? NO. This not the case here! Think about it. This is the very same saint, while still in his mother's womb, who leapt in awareness afforded him by reason and grace at the presence of the Savior! This is the same saint who exclaimed those timeless words used in the Holy Mass: *Ecce Agnus Dei*. This is the very same saint who saw the dove descend upon the Christ after baptizing Him in the Jordan. This is the saint who sent away his disciples to follow Him ... John and Andrew among them. NO... Absolutely NOT, St. John was indeed more than a prophet... He was fully aware that His Majesty was the promised Messiah.
3. Why, then, did he employ this little ruse? Because there is a spiritual battle taking place here... even among those seeking the Kingdom of God. Hmmm. It seems to me there is much to ponder here ... Because the battle for the Church is now on the inside ... and it is deeply spiritual in nature (as St. Paul said it is in Eph 6). Those like St. John the Baptist, seeking ever to preach the difficult truths, are, as it were, once again, in prison... sidelined... mitigated... talked about with people taking sides. In any case, the trial comes for all the faithful in seeking to follow His Majesty and not be mistaken as to Who He is... to follow Him regardless of our personal likes and dislikes.
4. In reflecting on this difficulty and what to do about it, let us use our spiritual theology because this is a spiritual battle. With a little help from Fr. Jordan Aumann, OP (cf. *Spiritual Theology*, pp 402-404), we find there are various signs of the divine spirit at work as well as signs of the diabolical spirit at work. In our Gospel today, not surprisingly St. John the Baptist exemplifies the signs of the Divine Spirit while his stubborn

disciples, who have heretofore refused to follow the Lamb as he directed them, show something of the diabolical spirit.

5. It should not surprise us that even good-hearted men can fall prey to this crafty fallen angel. Even great saints like the Cure of Ars, St. Jean Vianney, fell for his tricks at times, causing him to leave his parish three times. The devil loves to use what appear to be good things to cause good people to be at odds with each other and even to leave their proper place (in a marriage, family, parish or even the Church). Thus, the reason for St. John the Baptist's ingenious ruse to get his disciples finally to go over to their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.
6. Are we immune from the devil's influences? Are we so sure we are laboring for the right causes? A misplaced love, such as possessed by the disciples of John for their master, is easily taken advantage of by the diabolical spirit. Fr. Faber puts it like this: "We must remember that if all the manifestly good men were on one side and all the manifestly bad men on the other, there would be no danger of anyone, least of all the elect, being deceived by lying wonders. It is the good men, good once, we must hope good still, who are to do the work of Anti-Christ and so sadly to crucify the Lord afresh. Bear in mind this feature of the last days, that this deceitfulness arises from good men being on the wrong side."
7. To help us see these things, Fr. Jordan gives 16 signs of the Divine Spirit... Here are a few: (i) Love of Truth. Truthfulness. God is truth and cannot inspire anything but truth in a soul. "On their lips no deceit has been found" says the Apocalypse of the saints. Along with this characteristic, they love simplicity and sincerity... They shun any duplicity, exaggeration, arrogance, hypocrisy, or vanity. Thus, His Majesty called St. John "a burning and a shining light..." Others said of him, "all things whatsoever John said of this man, were true..."
8. (ii) Gravity. God is never the cause of things that are useless, futile, frivolous, or impertinent. When His spirit moves a soul it is always for something serious and beneficial. Thus, John always spoke and acted well. "A voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."
9. (iii) Docility. Souls that are moved by the spirit of God accept cheerfully the advice and counsel of their directors and superiors or others who have authority over them. This spirit of docility is one of the greatest

signs that a particular inspiration or movement is from God. This is especially true in the case of the educated, who have a greater tendency to be attached to their own opinions and self worth. Thus, St. John baptized His Majesty under protest...

10. (iv) Discretion. The spirit of God makes the soul discreet, prudent, and thoughtful in all its actions. There is nothing of precipitation, lightness, exaggeration, or impetuosity; all is well balanced, edifying, serious, and full of calmness and peace. And so, St. John confessed and spoke to all classes of men... Kings (while in prison), religious leaders, soldiers, tax collectors, and normal everyday people. Everyone trusted him!
11. (v) Patience in suffering. Suffering is frequently the best touchstone for revealing the true worth of an individual. No matter what the source of the suffering, or whether it is justly received or not, the soul bears it with patience and equanimity and uses it as a means of further perfection. Imagine standing in water all day long?? St. John was patient with his stubborn disciples too.
12. There are many other signs of the working of the divine spirit in the life of the faithful ... such as peace of soul, humility, purity of heart, confidence in God, self-abnegation, and a desire to imitate Christ. As mentioned St. John exemplified all of these perfectly... thus, his motto "He must increase, and I decrease."
13. The remaining disciples of St. John, however, who being too attached to him and unwilling to listen to his advice to follow the Lamb of God, can be considered as laboring somewhat under the influence of a diabolic spirit. Here are some of the signs of this spirit working in souls... If you squirm a little at hearing these, I am right there beside you...squirming as I too recognize these in my own life and soul!
14. (i) Spirit of falsity. The devil is the father of lies, but he cleverly conceals his deceit by half-truths. Are we not prone to exaggerate and make mountains out of mole hills?? The disciples of St. John made him to be greater than His Majesty. (ii) Unhealthy curiosity. This is especially characteristic of those who eagerly seek out the esoteric aspects of mystical phenomena or have a fascination for the occult or preternatural. It is also part of fallen man to desire to see the downfall of the righteous. Thus, people often look and see problems where there are none, prophesying future scandals... and the devil is very pleased to fuel this

curiosity with many unfounded suspicions. (iii) Confusion, anxiety, as well as deep depression. (iv) Obstinacy. One of the surest signs of a diabolical spirit. Unwilling to bend and work with others in what are valid and reasonable options and means. John's disciples constantly resisted his efforts to get them to go over to the Lamb of God! (v) Constant indiscretion and a restless spirit. Tend to go to extremes whether in penitential exercises or apostolic activity or some other personally chosen work while neglecting their primary obligations. (vi) Disobedience and hardness of heart. (vii) Impatience in suffering and stubborn resentment. (viii) Scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law and fanatical zeal in promoting a cause. This characteristic readily opens the door to diabolical influence in reformers and demagogues. Just think of the Pharisees regarding the letter of the Law for the Sabbath. The communists were often idealists and zealots. Fr. Jordan lists several other signs such as hypocrisy, duplicity, false humility, attachment to sensible consolation, pride and vanity.

15. What can be done? (i) We should firmly resolve to avoid being a tool of the devil by resisting his influence. How so? What did St. John do to his disciples... made them solve their problem by going to His Majesty. Notice how Our Blessed Lord answers the difficulty. He shows the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophecies, He shows them the miracles performed. He said the poor have the Gospel preached to them. In a word, He puts before their mind the good fruits. Oh how many today, myself included, solve their problems by talking about them to everyone BUT His Majesty... Yet, He is always available in the Most Blessed Sacrament, imprisoned here for us. He is also available in the Confessional. If we prepare ourselves and pray for enlightenment, the priest will speak for Him, willy nilly. Are we preparing? Are we listening?
16. (ii) Also, the time proven motto of St. Augustine is very helpful to live by. *In essential matters, unity; in non-essential matters, liberty; in all things, charity*. Essential matters are things of the faith... unbending truths of faith and morals. We profess them at the Creed and adhere willingly to all that the Holy Catholic Church teaches us as revealed by God. However, there are other matters, of which there are many, that are non-essential. How to proceed in some practical matter being among them... Different people will chose differently. There is sure to be

disagreement. Patience and flexibility in willing to consider opposing opinions are signs of the Divine Spirit whereas the diabolical spirit wants us to fight over them... to get angry and upset ... lose our peace ... become resentful... entrenched... indiscrete about voicing our differences of opinions. And sadly, charity grows cold.

17. (iii) When we perceive these diabolical influences in our lives, we should fight back quickly by doing the opposite of what is being suggested... We should do penance and practice self-abnegation... which is what Advent is for.
18. (iv) When we have a complaint or concern, we should approach the authorities in an orderly way to seek a resolution not talk about it to everyone else. This is partly why St. John had his stubborn disciples go to His Majesty. Make your concern known to those in charge.
19. (v) We should always turn to Our Lady to protect us from the devil and all his wily ways. She will help us. There is a spiritual battle being fought inside the Church now... it is here. Let us follow the lead of St. John the Baptist in fighting with battle by responding always to the movements and inspirations of the Divine Spirit... with the help of Our Lady all the while practicing patience with those still laboring under a false spirit, a spirit not divine.