

One might assume that today, the Third Sunday in Advent, the third purple candle on the Advent wreath is to be lit. Yet look, the ushers lit the pink candle. And no, they did not mess up. This is as it should be. Today is Gaudete Sunday which means “Rejoice!” Christmas is not yet, but it is near.

For two weeks we have been trudging through the penitential season of Advent. We are only halfway through. The wreath testifies to this. But we are closer to lighting the white Christ candle now than when we began.

So for the moment, ignore the Christmas tree up here with its lights and ornaments, along with all the other decorations. It is not Christmas...yet. Not until the white candle on the wreath is lit.

Our text basically says the same thing. The Jews sent priests and Levites out to where John was baptizing and they asked him, “Are you Christmas?” And he said, “No, I am not Christmas, I am Advent.” The conversation actually went like this, taking the Greek as it is written:

*“You, who are you?”*

*“I, I am not the Christ.”*

*“What then, are you Elijah?”*

*“I am not.”*

*“Are you the Prophet?”*

*“No.”*

*“Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”*

*“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”*

They were drilling him, weren't they? This was no friendly, “Hi, who are you?” It was a formal interrogation. But John did not cave. He stood his ground. He knew who he was, and he also knew who he was not.

That is more than a whole lot of people today know. Oh, they know their name, their social security number, their address, and so forth. But all that means absolutely nothing if they do not know the Christ. You cannot truly know yourself if you do not know Jesus.

John was nothing without Jesus. Take Jesus out of his story, and we do not even hear about John, for his life has no meaning as far as we are concerned. John truly knew who he was because he knew who he was in relation to Jesus. And that is all that matters.

What if you were put to an interrogation such as John was? “You, who are you?” Not your name, rank, and serial number. “Who are you in relation to Jesus?” How would you respond?

Well, since the wreath is before us, let us use it to give an answer. You can say, "I, I am a candle on the wreath." "Are you the white candle?" "No, I am not the Christ." "What then, who are you?" "I am the pink candle that was lit today, but I am also a burning purple candle."

Purple is a color for Advent, for it is the color symbolizing repentance. This is who you and I are in relation to God. We must always be the purple candle. We can never live outside of repentance. It is our daily life as Christians. If we ever stop being the purple candle; ever reach a point in our life where we do not need to repent, we are Christians no longer.

As purple candles we do not deny but confess. "My life is not as it should be. All my righteous deeds are but filthy rags. I am sinful through and through. It is my condition, and I am unable to rid myself of my sinful condition. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Notice where the purple candles are placed on the wreath. The white Christ candle stands in the midst of them. And this is how it is with us. We are beggars, this is true, but we are beggars before God. We do not simply confess our sins; we confess our sins to God. And He stays in your midst, as the white candle portrays, as One who hears you, who receives you, who forgives you.

You can truly know who you are. In relation to Jesus, your God, you are a sinner, the purple candle. But you are also a saint in relation to Jesus. For thus He names you in your baptism. And so you are also the pink candle; the candle which symbolizes rejoicing.

You do not have to wait for Christmas to rejoice, for Jesus does not wait until Christmas to come. He comes to you now. This is the meaning of Advent. It means *coming*. Jesus comes now to you with gifts of His grace. This is what your baptism means. This is what the Holy Supper before you means. This is why the Scriptures are read publicly here in the house of God. These are living words, for your living Lord comes to you in, with, and under these holy words.

This is exactly what John was saying to the priests and Levites. "*Among you stands one you do not know.*" The verb *stands* here indicates by its grammatical tense that Jesus has been standing there among them all along...for centuries. Every time they opened the Scriptures, He was right there among them. Every time they gathered to worship God, Jesus gathered there with them. But they do not know Him.

Do you know Him? Do you know Him who so wondrously created you? Do you know Him who suffered and died on a cross for you? Who placed your needs above His own? Who loves you and forgives you? Who forgives all your sins? If you do, this is why you are the pink candle. How can we not rejoice who have such a merciful and wonderful Lord and Savior!

Look at the white Christ candle. Maybe you know this, white is the color you get when you mix all the colors together. That is why sunlight appears white. It is a blend of every color. This is who Jesus is for you. Whatever your color, Jesus receives you into Himself. Have you been green with envy last week? Red with anger? Blue with depression? Yellow with fear? Whatever your color, you belong to Jesus. He rejects no color, no sinner. He takes each and every one of you to Himself. He forgives each and every one of you. Whatever your color, whatever your past, you are cleansed, for you are in Christ, the white candle on the wreath. Amen.