

**RORATE COELI / THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

Text: St. John 1:19-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✱ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

This is the twenty-first century, and though we live in the United States of America, the richest and freest country on earth, a country and a people with limitless potential, with a plethora of medical and technological wonders, riches, amenities, and modern comforts that makes us the most envied (and at times, the most hated) country on earth, it seems to me that what we often experience here is, sadly, more often like a wilderness than what one might call civilization.

What do I mean? Though we live in what we call “*civilization*,” we are morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt. The spiritual compass of our people and our leaders is broken, and no matter how you look at it, no matter which way you turn, it points to a spiritual wilderness. Even with all our blessings and benefits, we still live in a place and time filled with poverty, hunger, famine, homelessness, greed, hate, bigotry, and tribalism, murder, war, crime and corruption of every stripe and at every level of society and government. Just as the citizens of Babel, we have built ourselves a tower and we have made a name for ourselves.

Such things are really only symptoms of a much greater disease—the disease of sin. Sin is the cause for all the wrong in our nation and in our world. So, here we are, living in a world and wilderness of sin.

So, we are not nearly as “*civilized*” as we like to think that we are, and we are not nearly as sophisticated as we so arrogantly love to pretend. We are sinners, and as such we are full of pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. From these stem all of life’s misery, for out of the hearts of men comes all evil, and out of the abundance of the heart the evil mouth speaks.

So no, we are not at all “*civilized*.” We live in a make-believe world where we like to think of ourselves as capable of tolerance, compassion, and mutual respect. But stark reality confesses a completely different story. We like to think that in ours, the world has at last been graced with a generation which is much more sophisticated than any that has come before it. We have convinced ourselves that we are smarter, wiser, and more talented than any generation that has come before us and, therefore, history should stand up and take note that finally a generation has come along with the capability to fix every problem in this wicked world.

Yet, if that is truly the case, why then, do things seem to only be getting worse? Why do so many believe that killing the unborn is not murder as long as we attach the word “*choice*” to our sin? Can you explain to me how killing 63 million plus infants in the womb is any more civilized than Herod’s crime when he slaughtered the innocents of Bethlehem, or Pharaoh’s crime when he ordered that all the newborn male infants of the Hebrews be put to death? Why

do so many believe that blowing themselves up along with innocent bystanders is an acceptable form of religious expression or political protest? When did it become acceptable to behead infants and rape their mothers as a way of waging war? Who has been teaching our children that genocide is an acceptable way of achieving one's political and religious goals? Why do governments and the powerful in this world turn a blind eye to genocide while they spend billions upon billions of dollars protesting to protect baby seals and whales and to save the planet from so-called global climate disaster? Who are they saving the planet for?

Can anyone explain to me how today our hedonism and perverted lust for every pleasure of the flesh is any different from, or more sophisticated than, the pagan civilizations of our ancient world? How is our world, where one can find few prohibitions and fewer moral limits, civilized? We do not live in a civilization; we live in a wilderness—a cruel, dark, cold, wilderness, where, it seems, it is everyone for him or herself.

Into this desert wilderness God sent His messenger. His name was John. His name means: YAHWEH is gracious. And so He is, for through this man, St. John the Baptist, the Light of the LORD's Gospel would begin to shine into the long, dark, night of sin. He is the one sent before the LORD to prepare His way. He came speaking of the One of whom neither he, nor you, nor I, are worthy to unlace His sandals. He came to give testimony of, and point to, the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** Of this he has seen and given faithful witness that JESUS is the SON of the living God.

St. John the Baptist was a prophet of the Highest, though he was not *the* Prophet. He was not Elijah reincarnate, though he was sent to the people of God *"in the spirit and power of Elijah."* *"He was not [the] Light, but he was sent to bear witness of that Light."* He was not the CHRIST, but he was sent *"before the face of the LORD to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."* St. John the Baptist was sent by God *"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the LORD."* John came baptizing with water *"that through him, all might believe."* This was the mission of St. John the Baptist and this was his confession.

St. John came preaching an alternative to our so-called *"civilized"* life. His preaching holds JESUS CHRIST before the world, not as just one Way among many ways, but as *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life.

But his message is no more popular today than it was nearly 2000 years ago. John's brand of preaching is deemed unacceptable because he makes exclusive claims in a world that demands choices, options, and subjectivity. St. John lays claim to the truth in a world that claims that the only truth is that there is no truth, or if there is, it cannot possibly be known. The world finds St. John's preaching too stringent and his teaching too inflexible. Perhaps he has spent too much time in a camel hair suit. Perhaps his diet of insects has given him indigestion

and heartburn, making him mean and cranky. Whatever the case, the world does not like him and it does not much care for his JESUS either.

The world would rather that John teach a JESUS of tolerance. Like little children afraid of the boogey man, the world fears a just JESUS, a righteous JESUS. Even in the Church the JESUS preferred is a JESUS who will wink at our sins and pat us on our heads as though we are naughty, but cute, little children. If there has to be a JESUS then He must be morally neutral and see life in varying shades of gray, not in black and white. He must be a cafeteria JESUS who allows one to pick and choose what best suits him or her from a menu of choices. Instead of the King of kings it seems many in the Church would prefer JESUS be a Burger King who allows one to have it his or her way.

No, John is not very tolerant, and neither is his JESUS, for his JESUS is God and the most fundamental thing about God, my friends, is that, He is the only One; there is no other. And God will not share affections, loyalty, or worship, for He says, *“...I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.”*

So no, I am afraid God is not very tolerant either. If you will have Him, you can have no other. It is *“take Him or leave Him, all or nothing.”* He will tolerate no other gods.

Nor is there any room with God for sin. But then, is that not why we are so intolerant of God? Is it not the truth that the most fundamental thing about fallen humanity is that we want to be our own god and make our own rules? Is it not the truth that the world has come to believe there is no such thing as sin?

Repent! Repent and hear the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness. Hear his voice because it carries a message that is a matter of eternal life and death. To hear John is life, to ignore him and live as though his message does not matter, but as though your life and desires matter most, is to court destruction.

John cries out to you that you would open your eyes by first opening your ears. He tells you of the One who has come to Baptize *“you with the HOLY SPIRIT and fire.”* He comes to tell you that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and that it comes in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This sinless Lamb entered into the world bringing with Him grace and truth, *“for the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through JESUS CHRIST.”* What is that truth? It is the love of God who loved you by dying for you because He refused to leave you alone in this wilderness, dead in your sin. Instead, He sent the Light and Life of men into our sinful and pain-filled wilderness existence, and as many as believe in Him, He gives the right to become children of God. JESUS came bringing freedom for the captives and salvation to the oppressed. He came as our Great High Priest to enter into the Holy of Holies, *“not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own Blood.”* He came to die, so that you might live.

But the One who came to die for you did not remain in His tomb. He rose from the grave on the third day. JESUS lives and gives to you the benefits of His terrible suffering and death. Into CHRIST JESUS and His death, you were Baptized; not with water only, but with water and the HOLY SPIRIT where the Blood of CHRIST was poured over you to cleanse you from your sins. Being Baptized into His death means you have been united with CHRIST in His death in order that you be raised again to newness of life in His resurrection. The same Blood poured over you in Baptism is poured into you from the Chalice at His altar. In this Blood is Life; the Life of CHRIST, given and shed for you. With these blessed Sacraments JESUS makes you alive together with Him.

JESUS has given His life as a ransom for yours. He has loved you beyond all telling, beyond all imagining; He still does. Come, be united with Him in the Feast laid before you. Be forgiven, renewed, restored, reinvigorated, and at peace. The Passover Lamb has been slain. In His blessed death your sins died. He now lives again, but your sins were left in His grave. Eat this Lamb, drink His Blood, and the angel of death passes over you.

You do not have to die and suffer eternal torment because JESUS died for you. He died, but now He lives, and whoever believes in Him shall not perish but has the gift of everlasting life. He died in your place. In His death and resurrection He gives to you His righteousness, His innocence, His blessedness.

This is the message St. John the Baptist was sent to prepare God's people for. This message brings the peace the angels announced to the shepherds at our LORD's first Advent in Bethlehem. It is peace for Crestview, for Florida, for this nation, and this world. It is the peace of not living under the burden of the Law, but under the love of God. It is the peace, not of this world, not of this civilization. It is the peace of heaven. It is a peace beyond all human understanding. It is the peace of being counted worthy by Grace. It is the peace of knowing that your sins are forgiven.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

✠ ✠ ✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠ ✠ ✠

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II  
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Crestview, Florida  
12/24/23 A✠D