

## Homily for December 9, 2016

### Memorial of St. Juan Diego

This short episode deals with the failure of Israel as a whole to respond to John and Jesus. The call for repentance went out to many. John the Baptist announced this call in chapter 3:

“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near”

In chapter 4 at verse 17, Jesus makes the exact same pronouncement.

However, only a few took it to heart.

Jesus speaks of this generation. On the surface, the expression seems harmless enough, meaning the people who are alive now. But in the Bible, this phrase generally refers to an unfaithful generation. It calls to mind the wicked generation of Noah’s day (Gen 6:5–8) as well as the faithless generation of Israel that was denied entrance into the promised land. Deuteronomy 32:5 is a clear expression of this meaning:

*they are a perverse and crooked generation.*

It is those who in today’s psalm are described as the wicked, the sinners and the scoffers.

Jesus then tells a simple proverb that alludes to village life in Palestine. According to customs among children, boys invited their companions to dance at weddings and girls sang laments at funerals and invited their friends to mourn. Here, sounding the flute refers to the call of Jesus, who spoke of himself as a bridegroom enjoying the celebration of a wedding feast (9:15). Likewise, the singing of a dirge represents the ascetic witness of John, in particular the fasting he encouraged among his disciples (9:14). And the disagreeable playmates who refuse to dance or mourn—these are the crowds that declined both the festive invitation of Jesus as well as the penitential summons of John.

John came neither eating nor drinking, which means that he engaged in no celebratory feasting. The desert prophet, who lived on foods found in the wild, had nothing to do with banquets and delicacies. Nor did he know the joys of wine that normally went with it. For this reason, some people thought him exceedingly strange and concluded that he must be possessed by a demon. Jesus, however, attended dinner parties in order to bring his message to the common people. Yet some glared with a critical eye and called him a glutton and a drunkard (see Deut 21:20). In the end, it seems that nothing could please the faithless generation of John and Jesus. They turned their backs on feasting as well as fasting, for they wanted nothing to do with the wisdom of the Messiah and his forerunner.

So what does Jesus mean when he says:

*Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.*

Wisdom in the Bible is another term to speak of the ways of God. Jesus is therefore saying that both John and Jesus will be proved right by God in the long run by the very deeds they are criticised for by this generation.

This is a theme that finds expression with today's saint. Although he lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the fruit of his wise deeds were not fully justified til 2002.

Thousands of people gathered in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe July 31, 2002, for the canonization of Juan Diego, to whom the Blessed Mother appeared in the 16th century. Pope John Paul II celebrated the ceremony at which the poor Indian peasant became the Church's first saint indigenous to the Americas.

The Holy Father called the new saint "a simple, humble Indian" who accepted Christianity without giving up his identity as a First Nation's person.

First called Cu-au-ht-lat-o-huac ("The eagle who speaks"), Juan Diego's name is forever linked with Our Lady of Guadalupe because it was to him that she first appeared at Tepeyac hill on December 9, 1531. The most famous part of his story is told in connection with the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. After the roses gathered in his tilma were transformed into the miraculous image of Our Lady, however, little more is said about Juan Diego.

In time he lived near the shrine constructed at Tepeyac, revered as a holy, unselfish and compassionate catechist who taught by word and especially by example.

When we think of our Lord's teaching and the witness of St. Juan Diego we are drawn to the words of today's psalm. For here at the beginning of the psalter we have a psalm that declares "wisdom is justified by her deeds."

The deeds of a life that delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on God's law, day and night. Such a life understands that in this world there are two ways. The way of the wicked, whose pathway the wise will not follow, and the way of the righteous. They are the ones who in the midst of their generation are discovering life's true meaning and purpose can only be realized in relation to John the Baptist, Jesus and Mary.

They are the ones who are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all they do they prosper.

It was this prosperity that a Mexican peasant knew. May we discover ever more in our lives the path of wisdom and the justification that comes to us through Jesus.