

Homily based on the readings from December 13, 2025 (Sirach 48.1-4, 9-11; Matthew 17.9a, 10-13)

No matter how many people claim they want an encounter with the divine, *far* too few sincerely mean it. Many scholars devote their careers to debating abstract theological questions, but never actually take the time to pray. Many “spiritual seekers” spend years attempting to discover some sort of mystical knowledge, but never develop a personal connection with Jesus Christ. Many ordinary men and women are simply looking for a general sense of comfort, but are unwilling to accept the commitment that is necessary for an authentic relationship with the Lord. The truth is that meeting God – on his own terms – is never convenient and never fashionable. What it is, though, is totally life-changing.

Today’s readings focus on two individuals – the Prophet Elijah and Saint John the Baptist – who fearlessly called the people around them to open their hearts to the Lord. Elijah ministered to the ancient Kingdom of

Israel during the evil days of King Ahab, when many of the Chosen People had turned away from God and begun worshipping pagan idols. John the Baptist, of course, lived during the Roman occupation of the Holy Land – preaching *repentance* in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. Both of these men were despised by the political leaders of their day. Both lived under the constant threat of imprisonment or execution. Neither of them ever wavered in their commitment to proclaiming the truth.

The problem is not so much that kings and governors sought to silence these men of God – that is only to be expected. The problem is that so many other people – in particular, so many religious figures – heard the message that was being preached, and either did not understand it or willfully ignored it. As Jesus himself said, “they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased.” Even if they started off with the best intentions, in the end they were too focused on worldly concerns to recognize what was standing right in front of them.

The danger for all of us, of course, is not just that we will miss the *herald* of Jesus Christ – but that we will miss Christ himself. As we all know, the season of Advent is both a commemoration of an historical event – the Incarnation of Jesus Christ – and also a promise of a reality that has yet to arrive – his triumphant return, when “[h]e will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” As Christians, our duty is to live in a constant state of vigilance – always attentive, like the five wise virgins from the parable. Despite the many forces that are trying to cloud our judgment, we must never let our earthly attachments interfere with our fundamental calling. No responsibility, commitment, or obligation can ever outweigh our service to Jesus Christ. As frail and feeble human beings, we all need to be reminded – on a regular basis – what our true priorities actually are. Whenever we encounter a “John the Baptist” in our own lives – a person who holds us accountable to our beliefs – we need to stop and take note. We also need to be willing, when called to do so, to serve as a “John the Baptist” to other people. We “know neither the day nor the hour” when Christ will come again – *all* we know is that we need to be ready.