

12/14/14 3 Advent B

He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe.

-- One of the big things in the news has been the report on the CIA's use of torture issued by the Senate. Quite a number of people gave testimony to that committee, including Senator John McCain.

-- His testimony was particularly powerful, because he had been a victim of torture while he was a POW in Vietnam. He knew how men acted under torture from personal experience.

-- When I was in the Holy Land I heard the testimony of Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Anglican priest. When he was just ten years old, his family was forcibly removed from his home by Israeli soldiers in 1948. His dad's jewelry business was ruined, and they and many other Palestinians were displaced.

-- Testimony is most powerful when it is backed up by personal experience. John the Baptist came to give testimony, and he was not just carrying out a detached mission. It was a central part of his life.

-- He had immersed himself in the scriptures and the life of his religious community. Some people think he may have been part of the Essenes, a semi-monastic group that awaited the coming Messiah.

-- No doubt he was aware of the circumstances of his birth to parents beyond childbearing age. Yet he also knew he was not the chosen one. He was to bear witness to the coming Messiah. He had an accurate sense of who he was and who he wasn't.

-- Testimony is a word that might frighten us just a bit, especially when we discuss "religious" testimony. It's all too easy to think of preachers on a soapbox, or slick-haired evangelists shouting out of our TV's and graciously accepting contributions over a toll-free number.

-- But testimony is not primarily those things. And it's not the exclusive task of priests, religious and those who hold important positions in ministry in our parishes. It is the task of every Christian.

-- Testimony takes place when we tell a friend why our faith has been important to us or how God has helped us in some situation in life. Testimony takes place in offices, ball fields and even bars as much or more than it does in Churches and revival meetings.

-- When you accept a call to be a baptismal or confirmation sponsor and treat it seriously as more than a social honor, you are giving testimony. When you try to teach your children right from wrong using gospel values, you are giving testimony.

-- When you counsel a friend whose behavior may be leading him/her down a bad path, you are giving testimony.

-- Yes, we are summoned to take up the task John took on. We are not the Messiah. The salvation of the world—or even our friends and relatives—does not depend on us. We can and must let God do his work.

-- But we can prepare the way. St. Paul tells us not to quench the Spirit. God's spirit is given to each of us in Baptism and Confirmation for a purpose. That purpose is to give testimony to our faith.

-- In most cases it's not a dramatic thing. We should have no delusions that we are messiahs. But neither should we believe that our lives of faith make no difference for the world.

-- If we try to live our faith, and are not afraid to tell people why we do what we do, we are giving the testimony God asks of us.

-- And not only will we be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will likely help many others toward that same goal.