



## Matthew 11:2-11

**2** John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, **3** 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' **4** Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; **5** the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; **6** and happy is the man who does not

lose faith in me.'

**7** As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? **8** Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. **9** Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: **10** he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. **11** I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

Other readings: Isaiah 35:1-6,10 Psalm 145 (146) James 5:7-10

Our gospel reading, like that of last Sunday, focuses on John the Baptist, but his ministry is now at an end. He is in prison, and martyrdom awaits him. Curiously, he seems to have doubts about Jesus being the Messiah. He who was so confident in proclaiming the one who was to come now seems confused. How can we explain John's uncertainty?

A major feature of the preaching of John the Baptist was the coming of judgement. As we heard in last week's gospel, John expected the Messiah to bring retribution, to separate the chaff from the wheat and to consign the chaff to fire. John must learn that the way of Jesus is different: he brings healing and life, and good news for all.

This gospel reading has a powerful message for us. If it was indeed difficult for John to come to terms with the gospel of mercy, it may well be difficult for us to come to terms with the extraordinary love of God, who offers forgiveness to all. The gospel challenges us to accept in our minds and hearts that the Son of God brings forgiveness, and that the only thing which can deny us salvation and eternal life is our own refusal to be forgiven and loved. The one who is least in the kingdom of heaven knows this, and is 'greater than John.

*Am I willing to accept the good news of forgiveness for myself and for others?*

*'Happy are those who do not lose faith in me.' Do I trust the words of Jesus?*

*Let us pray for all those who consider themselves worthless and undeserving of love.*

*Let us pray for those who preach a god of retribution that they may know God's compassion.*