

Archbishop Smith: Should We Look for Another?

It is hard for us to imagine the depth of anguish behind this question. It was posed to Jesus by the disciples of St. John the Baptist, who from prison had sent them to question the Lord (cf. Matthew 11:2-11). It is hard for us to say with certainty what was in the mind of the Forerunner, but his painful circumstances, combined with what he was hearing about Jesus, led him to ask: "Are you the One who is to come? Or should we look for another?" He whose whole life had been given over to preparing others to welcome the Christ, he who had pointed out Jesus as the long-awaited One, now finds himself asking, "Should we look for another?"

Of course, Jesus does not leave him wondering. He quickly sends those disciples back with the answer: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." Jesus is here pointing to the signs that, according to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is. 35:1-6a, 10), would signal the arrival of the Christ. In other words, he is telling John, "You need look no further. I am he."

After Jesus gave that answer to John, he made an important statement that brings this dialogue between himself and John directly into our own circumstances. He said, "And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." It seems from the widespread abandonment of Christianity in our day that that is precisely what many are doing – taking offense at Jesus. The turning away from foundational Christian teaching is clear evidence that, without waiting for an answer, perhaps even without posing the question in the first place, many have decided that they should, indeed, look for another Saviour. More and more, the one most heralded as the answer to all of our hopes is not the Son of God but the autonomous Self.

Far from a reason for hope, this is cause for great worry. What happens when I no longer receive Christ as my Saviour, but turn away from him and rely upon myself, when I choose to be guided not by the Gospel but by my own reasoning and feeling?

Perhaps a helpful image to illustrate the quandary that arises from such a choice is one I shared last Thursday evening with the people gathered to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I recalled something I saw when I visited the shrine in Mary's honour in Mexico City.



The Old Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City leans from its sinking foundation. Image: Encyclopedia Britannica

To one side of the immense square at the shrine is what is called the Old Basilica, completed in 1709. It does not stand upright; it tilts to one side. Stepping inside this church, one finds that the floor slopes and you have to consciously maintain your balance. The reason for this is that the foundations are sinking. Much of Mexico City was built upon a former lake, so the ground is unstable.

A building whose foundations have been situated on unstable soil illustrates well what happens to a life that is grounded not on faith in Christ but on the choice for self-reliance. By taking offence at Christ and choosing instead to find surety in myself, popular opinion or what seems to be the latest plausible ideology means that I am building my life on quicksand, and that it will surely sink more quickly and more drastically than that old basilica I saw in Mexico City.

Should we look for another? No. Definitely, absolutely not. As we enter our final days of preparation for the celebration of the Lord's nativity, let's take the answer Jesus once gave to John as offered also to ourselves. Knowing we need look no further than to him gives rise within us to lasting peace and joy.