

Did you realize that there are two ways of approaching life and God's presence in the world according to our gospel reading? One way is demonstrated by John. The other way is demonstrated by the priests and Levites. We are either witnesses or interrogators.

John was a witness sent from God. The priests and Levites were interrogators sent by the religious authorities. "Who are you," they ask John. "Are you Elijah?" "Are you the prophet?" "Why are you baptizing?" They are in the dark. They are on the outside looking in and trying to figure out what is going on.

On the other hand, John knows who he is and who he is not. He claims for himself neither too much nor too little. That's what makes him a credible witness. He speaks the truth but he is not the truth. He is illumined but he is not the light. He is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness but he is not the Word of God. Everything about John points to the light and the life of the one who both stands among us and the one who is coming. John will bet his life on that one. That's how it is with witnesses. They live and die based on what they have seen, heard, and experienced.

The real difference between witnesses and interrogators is this. Interrogators demand answers. Witnesses offer hope. More than ever our world today needs witnesses of hope. We do not need more answers or explanations. We have enough interrogators. We need to hear "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

John's is the voice of hope. His words echo through the wildernesses of our world and our lives. John testified to a life and presence beyond his own. Within his voice is the Word that was in the beginning, the Word that was with God and the Word that was God, the Word that became flesh and dwells among us, the Word that enables us to become children of God. Everything that needs to be said was spoken in that one Word. That Word is our ultimate hope.

Think about the tragedies and difficulties of your life: the death of a loved one, an illness, an addiction, a divorce, guilt, the sin that separated you from God, others, and yourself. Answers and explanations did not sustain you. How, when, what, or why; all of the questions of the interrogator was not what you needed to hear.

It was the Word of hope that got you through it all. Hope doesn't make life easy. It makes life possible. Hope reminds us that it won't always be like this. There is light and life coming to us. It is already here among us. The interrogators of the world, however, make it difficult to hear that other voice, the witness of hope. The interrogators clamor and compete for our attention. They often speak the loudest but the voice of hope has never been silenced.

Which voice do we listen to? Which voice do we follow? Those are questions we must answer every day. We will become either witnesses or interrogators. We choose who we want to be.

Hope is not easy. We must practice hope. It means we rejoice always, we pray without ceasing, we give thanks in all circumstances. These practices enable us to both hear and become the voice of hope.

Interrogators will look at and question the circumstances of rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. Are the circumstances right for rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks? Is there reason for those things? They want answers, justifications, and reasons. Witnesses, however, look beyond the circumstances to the God who fills those circumstances. That is hope. It opens our eyes to see the one who is coming. It prepares our heart to welcome the one who is already among us. It makes straight the way of the Lord. Hope is not a feeling but an orientation and attitude of our life. It is a way of seeing. It allows us to recognize and know the Christ, already here and not yet here. Hope does not change the circumstances of our life; it changes us and that changes everything.