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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com)

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“Wisdom is vindicated by her works?” (Matthew 11:16).

Isa 48:17-19: Matt 11:16-19

In today’s Gospel, Jesus confronts his critics for refusing to respond to John the Baptist’s call to repent or to his plea to be merciful to sinners. They rejected John as a fanatic and Jesus as a glutton and drunkard for eating with tax collectors and sinners. But their refusal to decide was a convenient way to do nothing, a paralysis with purpose. Jesus likens them to children in the marketplace who refuse to play either a happy or sad song, preferring just to quarrel.

Indecision is a form of paralysis. American theologian Harvey Cox once challenged people during the social crises of the 1960s with the phrase, “Not to decide is to decide.” There was no escaping some form of commitment on the war in Vietnam, racial equality, the women’s movement or gay rights, because staying on the sidelines was also a position of consequence.

Among the themes of Advent, the Scriptures urge us repeatedly to be alert, stay awake, keep watch. It is a time to renew our faith, sharpen our sense of how real God is in our lives, speaking to us and inspiring us to live deliberately and act decisively as believers. Grace is a verb not a thing, always in motion like the Spirit prompting us as we move through our day.

Jesus told his listeners: "Wisdom is vindicated by her works." We know it in the results. Seeing grace at work is one of the joys of walking with God, alert to the moment. Justice and love flow from the same formula of "think, judge and act" that inspired so many Catholic missionaries to serve, social activists to jump to a cause and good Samaritans to stop and help.

John the Baptist was correct to ask people to put their houses in order and give them a deep cleaning in preparation for God's coming. And so was Jesus by preparing a feast for lost and hungry sinners ready to come home and by putting the light of love in the window to let them know they were welcome. May justice and mercy embrace in us as we open our doors this Christmas.

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