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### **Meditation on Matthew 11:11-15**

Today's Gospel is essentially about a great process of transformation, and not just any transformation, but that of the world as a whole. It is about the history of salvation, the history of God's relationship with humanity, in which God repeatedly seeks closeness to people, speaks to them through prophets, and reminds them of Himself. If we follow what is written in today's Gospel and what Jesus is trying to explain, then this transformation process has reached a culmination point or is at least imminent.

With John the Baptist, the series of biblical prophets reaches its climax. Jesus describes him as Elijah ("he is Elijah who is to come"; Matthew 11:15). In biblical language, this clearly signals the start of God's kingdom, the day of the Lord ("Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and dreadful day, behold, I am sending you Elijah the prophet"; Mal 3:23), referencing the prophet Malachi's book. What follows is very different from what we have known so far. And though John the Baptist is the greatest—meaning the most important and the closest to God among those born of a woman, that is, human beings—the least in the kingdom of heaven, in the kingdom of God, is greater than John. It is Jesus himself with whom God's kingdom begins and to whom John points, and who comes immediately before him (cf. e.g., John 1:23; 27). The entire process of transformation, as described in today's Gospel, is not without difficulty; in fact, it is even accompanied by violence and conflict ("From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force"; Matthew 11:12).

The description of the transformation process of the world towards the kingdom of God in today's Gospel is significant for those committed to safeguarding and advocating for people affected by abuse. This description provides a framework for interpreting personal experiences within this commitment and aids in understanding one's own role. One thing is unavoidable: the realisation that the church is also undergoing a process of change; shifting from a church that historically did not take those affected by abuse seriously, and protected perpetrators rather than caring for victims, to a church that is more alert, attentive, and sensitive in recognising and fulfilling its responsibilities towards vulnerable people. This shift allows it to follow Jesus Christ more consistently and become a clearer sign and instrument of the emerging kingdom of God than before.

And this transformation process of the church as a whole in the context of a changed approach to cases of abuse is not without its problems and conflicts. Not everyone shares the opinion that the church has to change, as the crime of abuse is primarily the responsibility of the perpetrators and not the church, and they overlook structural connections and responsibilities. Many demand change from others, but not from themselves, because, after all, it is the bishops who bear responsibility, not

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the "normal" church member. They overlook their challenging role and importance as the baptised and confirmed. Some do not believe in the possibility of change within the church and even advocate for its complete abolition in its present form, overlooking the possibilities of the Holy Spirit's work. Some are simply too cowardly, too comfortable to even address the issue of abuse, and they forget all human solidarity. Others use the debate about the right way to make the necessary changes for their own church's political power games, and betray their faith.

Where to get involved and how? Does it all make sense at all? Aren't we running into walls and wasting energy? To arrive at an appropriate answer here, it is worth considering the following, in light of today's Gospel and with a view to the role of John. Firstly, you yourself are not Jesus, with whom everything changes significantly. Secondly, the upcoming change in the church regarding safeguarding is a gradual process, not an abrupt change. Your own commitment to safeguarding is a contribution within this process. Thirdly, like John, you are one of a number of people who have worked for safeguarding in the church before you and those who will do so after you. Fourthly, no matter how great your own effective contribution to consistent safeguarding within the Church may be, one thing is always possible, namely, to speak and act prophetically like John. In concrete terms, this means continually reminding people, both in word and deed, of how God Himself, through Jesus, has taken care of the marginalised, the neglected, and the vulnerable.

### **Prayer**

Lord our God, you have repeatedly revealed yourself to people through your prophets and reminded them of what it means to be a child of God. Your prophets had the courage to openly confess and name what is contrary to your will. Keep giving us your spirit, which frees us from laziness, fear and despondency.

### **Question**

Where and when can I speak and act prophetically in the spirit of Safeguarding?

