

Cycle B, Third Sunday of Advent

Reading 1, Is 61:1-2a, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God. I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels. As the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise spring up before all the nations.

Responsorial Psalm, Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54.

R. (Is 61:10b) My soul rejoices in my God.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed:

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

Reading II, 1 Thes 5:16-24

Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

Gospel, Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'*" as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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The first two Sundays of Advent focused our attention on the end times, death, judgement and our destiny. The 3rd Sunday of Advent focuses us on the Lord already among us, which is cause for celebration.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist cleared the path for the coming of the anointed one. But, since Jesus' death and resurrection it has been through our lives, the lives of believers empowered with the Holy Spirit, that has been the pathway through which Jesus has entered the world. That's why Advent is the perfect time to ask, "God what kind of person do you want me to be?" It is not always easy for us to hear God's answer. But it is a question that we Catholics are expected to ask anyway, throughout our lives.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that *"Deep within our conscience we discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves, but which we must obey. Its voice sounds in our heart at the right moment, ever calling us to love, and to do what is good and to avoid evil. . . . For we have in our heart a law inscribed by God. . . . Our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There, we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths. Moral conscience, present in our hearts, commands us at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil...When we listen to our conscience, we can hear God speaking. Return to your conscience, question it. . . . Turn inward, and in everything you do, see God as your witness."* In this never-ending search, everyone young and old, must undertake for themselves to find out what is right and what is wrong...this is what we Catholics call the "formation of conscience."

Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to bring everyone the promised gifts of justice, glad tidings, healing, liberty and God's peace...and only hearts open to His promise can receive the gifts. We must respond with praise and gratitude every day of

our lives. It is not easy, and does not always feel comfortable ...but it is the kind of person He wants us to be.

I remember thinking about the verse “*In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus*” when my mother died 35 years ago after suffering for 2 years with cancer. I recall praying, “God how can I thank you for my mother dying?” Questions are good ways to pray because we have to listen for the answer. The answers came in the years after this. I came to learn that I should thank God for my father caring for my mother. After they found out she had cancer, he never went back to work so he could stay home to care for her. Before that I loved my Dad, but I didn’t like him....after that, I forgave him and we had a great relationship for 20 more years. I also learned that maybe I felt a bit of the pain of loss that Mary must have experienced when her son Jesus died on the cross. And, maybe I had some of her enormous faith that His life didn’t end, and neither did my mother’s. Finally, I thank God that because of this experience He was preparing me to be a better Deacon who would understand how important it is to support people in their time of grief.

As we form our consciences we choose to be close to God, and He promises His salvation. Today during Advent we can taste that promise if we respond to His call with an attitude of conversion....if we awaken to His presence in the Scriptures and the Holy Eucharist....if we recognize His presence in ourselves and in others. In other words, if we let Him, Jesus will teach us what kind of person He wants us to be.

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