

Third Sunday of Advent - Lectionary: 8

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.

Reading 2 - 1 THES 5:16-24

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.

The theme, traditionally, on the third Sunday of [Advent](#) is joy. But to better understand why, we need to recall that in the past, Advent was much more like Lent as a [penitential season](#). Some folks might remember when there were [four fast days](#) during Advent and the atmosphere was deliberately somber and penitential. So, in the midst of all the penance and fasting, today was conceived as a window of joy and brightness in anticipation of what was to come. We carry over this more somber Advent 'feel', in the first word of the entrance hymn today which is "Rejoice!" A tradition continued from the Latin Mass during which the first word of the [entrance antiphon](#) was "*Gaudete*" (rejoice, be glad). In Latin grammar, this word *Gaudete*, is an imperative... we are being 'commanded' to rejoice! Therefore, this Sunday has come to be known as "[Gaudete Sunday](#)".

So, why are we 'commanded' to rejoice? Was it just to give the folks a break from reflecting on all their [sins](#), [fasting](#) and [penance](#)? Of course not. It is, as [Isaiah](#) says, to give remind of our reason to rejoice. Rejoice because of God's love for us, care for us, closeness to us. It is because God wants to remind us that no one should ever focus on having sinned greatly without also being mindful of God's great mercy which leads to [forgiveness](#) and redemption. To be filled with Joy at the great Love of God for us. Joy, in knowing that no matter how tough our days may be, He is with us always, loves us always and desires to be one with us, always. "And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" [literally 'pitched his tent'] [John 1:14](#). These characteristics of God's love are '[glad tidings](#)' to all. In New Testament Greek, (euangelion) and Latin (evangelium), the Gospel / the Good News.

Why has he come? Why has he been sent? Because "God so loved the world" [John 3:16](#). God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" [Romans 5:8](#). "I exult for joy in the Lord...for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a mantle of justice." [Isaiah 61:10](#) Jesus fulfills the promise to all of us of salvation, that is, a real wholeness and integrity in our lives, which is the complete opposite of lives fragmented by fear and the never-satisfied desire to possess.

If you have not yet had that experience of which Isaiah speaks, if his words do not seem to 'ring true' for you; then you haven't truly encountered, know, the Jesus who makes whole, who frees us from our captivity and we can not yet say that we've ever experienced the true joy and meaning of Christmas.

Insofar as we do not share the joy of which Isaiah speaks, as long as we are not yet saints living the freedom won by Christ, and have not kept firm but have become subject again and again to the yoke of slavery in sin [Gal 5:1](#); We are the poor who receive the good news of salvation. We are the broken whose hearts He heals. We are the captives of sin in need of liberation. We are the ones who are imprisoned in all kinds of darkness who want to be made free. [Isaiah 61:1](#) We are in need of God's [grace](#).

But for those of us who believe, who know Christ and who are striving toward the holiness to which we are called [Lumen Gentium Ch 5](#); we cannot wait for that perfection in order to share our joy with others. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the coming of God through [new life in Christ](#), we need also to remember that we have been called to bring Jesus into other people's lives. So many have no idea that this light in us, the light of Christ, the Light of the World, was born among us to save them from their sins too.

We do well to ask ourselves and challenge each other, into the lives of how many people this Christmas will we bring the Light of Christ? [John 8:12](#) How many will experience Jesus [being reborn](#) within them through our witness and testimony? So many out there are waiting. Waiting for us to shine the light of Christ on them and to turn their lives into experiences of joy, of wholeness and integrity. [2nd Corinthians 4:6](#)

So just as Paul exhorted the people 2000 years ago, he says to us today, "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.” [1st Thess 5:16-24](#)