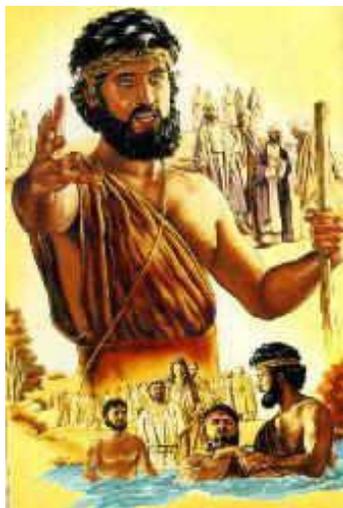


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community
3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Cycle B - December 13, 2020



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

All: For he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed.

Leader: *The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.*

All: He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Reading [Isaiah 61 (1-2), (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.



Commentary

The anointed of the Lord feels he has been called by God and sent to bring a message of hope and freedom to the poor and oppressed. Originally the message was written to announce the return of the Israelites after the exile in Babylon. The relationship between the people and God is illustrated with the image of a bridal suite, which emphasizes the relationship is one of love, joy, and celebration. The believer comes to recognize that only through God's intervention is it possible to overcome difficulties and experience joy. In this sense, the message is universal and is still true today because God continues to work in and for his people.

The "year of grace of the Lord" was celebrated every 50 years, after 49 "regular" years (7 times 7). According to the rule of Leviticus 25, it was declared that a jubilee year would be celebrated every seven "weeks" of the year. In this jubilee year, people enjoyed wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. (Read Leviticus 25:1-12)

The opening words of the second paragraph ("*I rejoice in the Lord ...* ") illustrate the reason for the festive atmosphere of this Sunday in which the color of the candle changes from purple to pink.

Reflection

- (1) What words or expressions from the reading caught your attention?
- (2) Read Isaiah 42 (1-7). Compare it to this reading and discuss.
- (3) Read Luke 4 (16-21). Reflect on what it draws out from this text in a new way.
- (4) At our baptism, we were anointed with Holy Chrism, the oil of consecration. Do you know the meaning to saying "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*"? Do we have awareness of the mission that is expected of us as God's anointed ones? How can we live that better?

Second Reading [1 Thessalonians 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.

Commentary

It is thought that this letter is the oldest document of the New Testament, written even before the Gospels. Toward the end of the text, Paul gives a series of exhortations and concrete practices that are still as relevant for Christians of the Third Millennium as they were for the Thessalonians: seek fraternal relationships, desire to be a spirit-filled Christian, live in the spirit of solidarity, and be willing to forgive.

Christians must take into account that everything comes from God and it is only in Him that we can rely. This is why we must live our lives constantly praying for the Spirit to forever be alive in our hearts. Once more we hear of what we have been reminded in the last few weeks: The invitation to remain blameless until the parousia, the second coming of the Lord, or in other words, live in a permanent Advent.

Christian hope is based on God's faithfulness because He does not abandon who has been called. God has always been faithful to his promises and this is the reason for our hope.

The opening words ("*Rejoice always ...*") also justify the festive atmosphere of this Sunday in which the color of the candle changes from purple to pink.

Reflection

(1) How we can "*pray without ceasing*"?

(2) Catholics are very accustomed to prayer that involves repeating or reading prayers composed by others. But we can also pray by simply having a conversation with God. How do you feel called to develop further these two ways to communicate with God?

(3) Read 1 Corinthians 1 (9). How does this verse compare to the above reading?

(4) How can we put into practice the advice, "*do not inhibit the action of the Holy Spirit*" ?

Gospel [John 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."

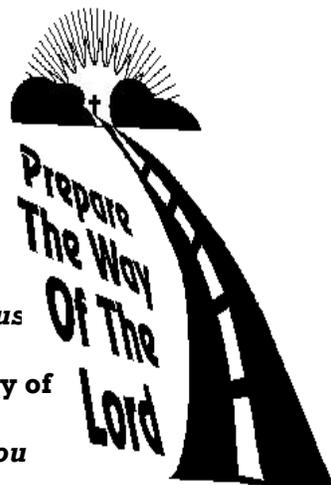
So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you have to say for yourself?"

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.



Commentary

In the first chapter of John's Gospel we find this reference to John the Baptist. We notice that this character is striving to awaken the people and orient them toward a proper reception of the Messiah. First, the evangelist introduces us to his "namesake" as a witness. He is also depicted as a herald and dutiful servant of a mission to guide everyone toward the faith. The first statement of the Baptist is solemn and official because it occurs before the religious authorities (priests and Levites).

Due to the fact that the prophet Malachi had announced (read Malachi 3:23) that Elijah would precede the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah, John clarifies that he is not that prophet. Nor was he the prophet for which Israel had hoped (read Deuteronomy 6:15). Quoting the prophet Isaiah (Read Isaiah 40:3) John the Baptist describes himself as "a voice crying in the wilderness". He states that his job is to "prepare the way" and that his baptism is purely a preparatory one. Although He has not yet been introduced, John announces that the Messiah is now living in the midst of them and invites them to open their eyes to recognize him when He is manifested.

Reflection

- (1) John the Baptist shows great simplicity and humility when he tries to explain who he is and who is not. How can we apply this attitude to our personal lives?
- (2) In the first reading Isaiah is sent with a message from God. In the gospel, God sends John as a witness of the light. Do you consider yourself in some way sent from God? Could you also be witness to the light? How?
- (3) What are the challenges you are most concerned about? What would happen if yours was the "voice" that sought to pave the way of the Lord? Where would you look for help?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

Deacon José Moronta DeaconJMoronta @ stmarktampa.org

