

Third Sunday of Advent – December 17, 2017 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: 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.

Psalm: Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

R. 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)

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)

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)

Scripture Reading: 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: 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.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

"Who are you?" John the Baptist had no difficulty answering this question when the authorities came to investigate him. If someone challenged your identity -- both naturally and spiritually, how would you answer? There's an identity war going on today and many are in crisis or at least confused. We can try to manufacture identity, but it's derived. And its true source and maker is God who made us in his image and likeness. Why did the Jewish leaders question John the Baptist's identity? They were in earnest to know if the Messiah had come. They wanted to know if John claimed to be the Messiah or one of the great prophets who was expected to return at the coming of the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5, Deuteronomy 18:15). John had no mistaken identity. In all humility and sincerity, he said he was only a voice bidding people to prepare the way for the coming of the King. John the Baptist bridges the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament Prophets who points the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. He is the herald who prepares the way for Jesus and who announces his mission to the people: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!* John saw from a distance what the Messiah came to accomplish — our redemption from slavery to sin and our adoption as sons and daughters of God, our heavenly Father. Do you recognize your identity as a child of God and a citizen of heaven?

John was the greatest of the prophets, yet he lived as a humble and faithful servant of God. He pointed others to Jesus, Messiah and Savior of the world. The Christian church from the earliest of times has given John many titles which signify his mission: *Witness of the Lord, Trumpet of Heaven, Herald of Christ, Voice of the Word, Precursor of Truth, Friend of the Bridegroom, Crown of the Prophets, Forerunner of the Redeemer, Preparer of Salvation, Light of the Martyrs, and Servant of the Word.* Do you point others to Christ by your witness and example?

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Do you know anyone who consistently points beyond her or himself to God? Share a story about this person or his/her impact on you with the group.
2. If someone asked you the question about today's Gospel, "Who are you?" how would you respond? Why? What is the role of being an individual; in your life? How do your relationships shed light on who you are? What might you want to change about yourself or your relationships in order to be your true self and the *Dynamic Catholic* we are called to be?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

1. Try to identify one person for whom Christmas is a lonely or difficult time (perhaps someone in your family, someone who has lost a loved one, someone kept far from family by distance or expense.) Spend some time with this person--- go for a walk, have a cup of coffee or breakfast and listen to his or her story.
2. Get involved at a project at OLPH Church or Academy. Give of you time, your energy, or your money, so as to bring some joy and light to some of those in need of cheering up.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

ALL: Jesus, Light of the World, come into the darkness of our world and our lives. Help us to recognize our true identity as those who are created in your image to both love and be loved. Strengthened by the witness of St. John the Baptist, may we also herald the coming of Christ through our thoughts and actions. We ask this through the Eternal Light, who takes away all darkness. Amen!