

Third Sunday of Advent December 12, 2021
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak." ¹⁷ The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸ as on a day of festival. "I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

Responsorial Psalm: Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name; among the nations make known his deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement; let this be known throughout all the earth. Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

¹⁰ And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." ¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

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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

The question, "What shall we do?" found in this week's Gospel reading arose from John the Baptist's exhortation to "bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance." We must keep in mind that John, as the forerunner of Jesus, prepared people to receive him as Lord and Christ. During Advent we also anticipate the arrival of Jesus, the Christ, hoping that he will be birthed afresh in our hearts and lives, bringing a new awareness of the hope of salvation. Consequently, this passage provides insight as to how we might prepare to receive him. It is interesting that John relates repentance first with action rather than simply having deep feelings of regret. The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary supports this position by listing as the first definition of repentance, "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life." It is only when we look at the second definition that we encounter feelings of "regret and contrition," and "change of one's mind." Obviously, both aspects of repentance are important, however John's use of repentance emphasizes action and a change of behavior, and not simply inner feelings which can easily be forgotten once we arise from our knees. Many might question whether this imperative to change our sinful behavior is really "good news." Perhaps one would be justified to think this way, had John's message stopped there, but it didn't. John also foretold the impending appearance of another messenger from God who was to be more important and powerful than himself, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now that is good news! The Holy Spirit, who is a gift to us from the Father and the Son, is an integral part of the good news of Jesus' first advent. The Holy Spirit is the means to the end, release from captivity to sin and to rebirth into a life with God. He is the indwelling power for changing our inclinations, enabling us to break old habits of sin and replace them with new habits of righteousness. This space is too small to even begin to reiterate all the grace and gifts that come with his presence but suffice it to say that they are manifold. As the Catechism explains: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Because we are dead or at least wounded through sin the first effect of the gift of love is the forgiveness of our sins. The communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church restores to the baptized the divine likeness lost through sin. He, then, gives us the 'pledge' or 'first fruits' of our inheritance; the very life of the Holy Trinity, which is to love as 'God [has] loved us.' This love... is the source of the new life in Christ, made possible because we have received 'power' from the Holy Spirit." *As Christians we too often forget this aspect of the Good News which Jesus brought. He has imparted to us the Holy Spirit. This constant companion and intercessor helps us to experience real incarnational life in Christ. This Third Week of Advent should remind us of this message of hope and gift of enablement. Additionally, it should renew us in his love, and prepare us to open our hearts wholly to him.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. Why should we not fear or be faint hearted?
2. What does the phrase “the Lord s in your midst” convey to you?

Second Reading

3. How does prayer, supplication and thanksgiving transform our anxieties into peacefulness?
4. How do you think the peace of God is expressed in one’s life?

Gospel Reading

5. In verses 10-14 John expresses several behavioral changes. What corresponding change in attitude is necessary to sustain these behavioral changes?
6. What do John’s statements in verses 15-17 intimate about the nature of Jesus and his ministry?
7. Explain as best you can, your understanding of what sacred Scripture and the Church teach about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

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.

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 a final prayer.