

Second Sunday of Advent December 5, 2021

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9

¹ Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the glory from God. ² Put on the robe of the righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. ³ For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. ⁴ For your name will for ever be called by God, "Peace of righteousness and glory of godliness." ⁵ Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. ⁶ For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. ⁷ For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. ⁸ The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. ⁹ For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.

R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

⁴ ...always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ... ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; ³ and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

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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

“Pre-evangelism” is a modern ministry term that refers to the biblical process of preparing people to receive the Good News of Jesus and the salvation available through him. In one sense it is very much like the agricultural process of preparing the soil to receive seed so that the seed has the optimal chance of germinating and springing into life. The farmer prepares the soil by plowing, tilling, and adding various soil supplements, depending on the condition of the soil. This process takes time, energy and money, however without proper soil preparation much seed would be wasted, and the harvest greatly diminished. John the Baptist was a herald of Jesus’ arrival on the scene and history of man’s salvation. John’s austere life and straightforward proclamations prepared the way for the appearance of Jesus and the starting of his ministry. John was involved in “pre-evangelism” long before the term was coined, for he conditioned hearts to be receptive to the arrival of the Lamb of God, and Jesus’ work of salvation. Consequently, when Jesus presented himself to John to be baptized, several of John’s disciples were prepared to follow Jesus, ultimately becoming his disciples. Because of John’s preparatory work the seed of Jesus’ words fell on the receptive soil of their hearts, bringing forth both growth and fruit. We know that Christ has come, that’s what we celebrate during this season of Advent. However, there dwells in our midst many people for whom Jesus’ coming does not exist. Though they may know his name and even use it when cursing, they don’t know who he is, they do not comprehend what he has done for them, and they have never encountered him personally. Many are bruised and battered by life, cynically rejecting the Truth, and steeling themselves against further hurt they remain unreceptive to the seeds of Truth. Like the people of John the Baptist’s days people need a herald to awaken their hearts to the Good News. As Pope Paul VI points out “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live.” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 21)

Like the farmers soil, people need someone who cares enough to gently break up the fallow ground of their hearts by their living witness, so that it can receive the seeds of Truth. The season of Advent is a prime time to begin this process with people we know. Advent lends itself to being friendly and expanding relationships. Casual conversations about Christmas plans, feelings, and traditions can easily overflow into a gracious and non-threatening sharing with others the real meaning of Christmas for us. Little kindnesses and thoughtful, unexpected acts of grace-filled giving can soften, and melt hearts steeled by life’s hurts, communicating love, care and concern. We not only can be, but must be, heralds of Jesus especially during this season of Advent. Who knows? Perhaps God will use us in this season to herald his coming to a friend or family member who will hear him, for the first time.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. This passage speaks of the joyful return of captive Israelites to Jerusalem and to the community of those who gather around the word of the Holy One. How would you describe to someone who is living in spiritual captivity, the transformation available to them in Christ?

Second Reading

2. What part do you think our prayers play in another's spiritual growth?

Gospel Reading

3. What do you think John the Baptist was doing in the wilderness? Does his experience have any application for us?
4. Isaiah prophesied of John the Baptist's crying out in the wilderness. What do you think is the wilderness of our society?
5. How would you restate John's message of preparation, and promises, so that people today would understand and respond?

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.