



Parish of the Holy Eucharist

Small Group Faith Sharing Material

3rd Sunday of Advent—December 15, 2013

Sunday Readings



Opening Prayer

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, for ever and ever.

(source: The Roman Missal, Third Typical Edition)



Mass Readings

Reading 1

Is 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.

The Word of the Lord

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 146: 6-10

R. Lord, come and save us.

The LORD God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free.
R. Lord, come and save us.

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.
The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.
R. Lord, come and save us.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.
R. Lord, come and save us.

Reading 2

James 5: 7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not

complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel

Mt 11: 2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.

Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

The Gospel of the Lord



Commentary

Matthew

John had to hear from Jesus himself: "What's going on? You don't seem to be the firebrand that I had expected as a Messiah? What are you up to? Did I make a mistake in designating you as the One? You are going around with some of the same stuff I ranted and raved about: 'Repent; the Kingdom of God is near.' But you are also very gentle and kind and caring. All this 'love and forgiveness' that you keep talking about sort of confuses me and my followers. Is a real Messiah going to come or are you the right one after all? Was I wrong about you, or

was I wrong about the kind of Messiah we were supposed to expect?"

John has been arrested and will shortly pay with his head on a platter for being so direct with his message. Of course, Jesus will pay his price, too, on the Cross of Calvary, when His time has come. Jesus apparently waits for John to have finished his mission before He begins His own.

Matthew's community, rooted in the kind of Judaism which owed a lot to John the Baptist, had to make sense of the relationship between John and Jesus. Did Jesus ever reject John? Or John's message? Or John's style and tactics? Disciples of John the Baptist were probably still clinging to the memory of John and hesitating about the full message of Jesus, even up to the time Matthew was writing, around 80-85 of the Common Era (CE). Matthew had to clear up the confusion for his Church: "John is the greatest of all the prophets: he prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah of God. He himself pointed to the works he performed as evidence that the Kingdom of God had come in his life, his teaching, and his works." (See Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20).

The least born in the kingdom is greater than John. The new order of things which has been inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus surpasses all that was ever done or expected in the previous age. Who would ever have expected that God would come in person, as a human, born in time and space, to live among His people as one of them? The Christ represents an entirely new reality, an insertion of God himself into the very middle of creation. Matthew had to convince his community that God had outdone himself in generosity toward Israel; that God had overwhelmingly transcended all previous expectations and promise. To live now, in this new reality, needs to be seen as far surpassing anything done under the previous dispensation. To live after the cross and the resurrection of Jesus cannot be compared with any prior blessing that God had ever given to the world. Early Christians and today's Christians need to be reminded of that fact.

The season which helps us prepare for the coming of the Anointed One must be taken seriously if we are ever to realize how incredibly privileged we are to have been chosen to live in post-resurrection times. Advent has to put us in touch with the Easter events so that the true meaning of Christmas will be unveiled. In that one sentence, Matthew helps us to connect with the true source of our awesome dignity as a people of the Resurrection.

Isaiah

For a people in Exile in Babylon, with their Temple and their Holy City of Jerusalem lying in utter ruin, with their homes devastated and reduced to a mere desert, this message of hope must have been most cheering and sustaining: That desert will break out into bloom again; they will be restored to their land. At the summit of this experience of rebirth, they will once again be able to worship their God on Mount Zion.

James

First generation Christians were beginning to pass away and still the Lord had not yet returned. Some were beginning to falter; some began to lose hope; most were terribly impatient. They had good reason to be restless: the most horrendous persecutions assailed them from every side. What was the meaning of all this? To what purpose would they continue to hold out? The writer of the Letter of James invites them to persevere in patience. The prophet too had had to endure unspeakable trials.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What value is there for us in recalling the staunch, unflinching truth of John the Baptist amid the challenges of a world in which self-indulgence and sense-gratification govern most of our decisions and choices? Isn't it true that we often choose what is easy over what is right? Living in a world that is truly *soft* compared to the world in which our ancestors lived, do we still have the *moral stamina* needed to make hard choices that lead to salvation?

2. What lesson is there for your family, for your parish community, in this Gospel reading? Are we willing to make the hard choices that must be made if we are to be faithful disciples of our Crucified Lord? How could the family witness more effectively to the values by which John the Baptist lived and died rather than by the self-indulgence of Herod Antipas?



Watch the Video

Please watch the reflection on the weekly readings prepared by the staff at Parish of the Holy Eucharist. It can be found on the parish website at www.pothe.org or you may obtain copies of the DVD at the parish office. See www.POTHE.org to watch the video or use the DVD provided by the parish.

Prayers of Intercession

Conclude with the "Our Father"



CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #1145-1149

A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.

Signs of the human world. In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. As a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions. The same holds true for his relationship with God.

God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator.¹⁶ Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness.

Inasmuch as they are creatures, these perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God. The same is true of signs and symbols taken from the social life of man: washing and anointing, breaking bread and sharing the cup can express the sanctifying presence of God and man's gratitude toward his Creator.

The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to this cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy of the Church presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ.

God has not yet finished the work of our salvation in Jesus Christ. There remains much to be accomplished before it can be said that the universe has been transformed into the reality which God intends for creation. The work of the Church remains to be done if its mission is to be complete.

God has entrusted to the People of the Promise, first those of the original Israel and then to us, the New Israel, the task of making all things new for the glory of the

Creator. Jesus Christ came to bring the divine hand into that work. Christ continues to work through the ministry of the Church, indeed through all persons of good will, toward the completion of the work of the Father. A world renewed to the splendor of its original existence as it came from the hand of its Creator must come from our hands today. Hearts made new in the transforming experience of conversion and redemption must come from the heart of Christ and from our own love as the continuation of Christ's love.

Who will do that work if not those who have heard the message of the prophets and the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The Church hears the Gospel and puts it into practice as it lives out its mission in the world of every age and of every place. The Church cannot be anyone but ourselves who are the Body of Christ and who celebrate its truth in the sacraments daily and everywhere.

Out of God's creation itself, we take up the signs and symbols of God's saving presence among us to celebrate and to retrieve the redeeming power of God in the world. Through sacraments, through prayer, through good works in family life, in the secular world, and in the Church, we take up the task of renewal of God's creation in order to build a new kingdom for the glory of the Father. Jesus Christ is at work through us to this day making all things new.

The marvel of it all is that we use the very creation of God: water, bread, wine, oil, words, human hearts, gestures and actions, to make a new creation, to transform the original creation, out of the disorder that our sins have imposed upon it and imbedded into it. All by the power of the Spirit given by Jesus Christ.

Credits

Opening Prayer. *Missale Romanum, Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2008. *Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 2011.

Readings for Mass. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC.

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Catechism of the Catholic Church