

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Third Sunday of Advent—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Third Sunday of Advent (Year B)

(All readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary of the Catholic Church.
The Lectionary readings for the United States are taken from the New American Bible.)

Reading 1

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.

Responsorial Psalm

Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

R. (Is 61:10b) 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. My soul rejoices in my God.
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. My soul rejoices in my God.
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. My soul rejoices in my God.

Reading 2

1 Thes 5:16-24

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.

Alleluia

Is 61:1 (cited in Lk 4:18)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Jn 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.

Exegesis:

Is 61:1-2A, 10-11

Our first reading today is taken from what scholars refer to as *Third Isaiah* or *Trito-Isaiah*. The setting is the return of the of the Israelite people to their homeland from captivity in Babylon. It is the end of the exile. There is great rejoicing in their newfound freedom but think of what they returned to and the task that now lay before them. Their city and the magnificent temple lay in ruins. Yet, somehow in the depth of their being they are finding joy, “in my God is the joy of my soul.” It is the Spirit of the Lord that is upon them that is the source of their rejoicing. Being set free they become aware of their captivity. Being set free is the beginning. Freedom is the beginning of a journey, often an arduous journey. When God is with us there is always joy in the journey no matter what the exterior circumstances.

The word that is translated as “release” could also be translated as “light”. From the darkness of captivity, the darkness of the dungeon the prisoners are brought to the light of day. This is an overarching theme throughout the season of Advent, i.e. the movement from darkness to light. The Gospel John the Baptist proclaims that he came to testify to the light. It is Christ who sets us free, transports us from the darkness of sin to Himself who is the Light of the World.

Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

The response today is the great Magnificat of Mary. Filled with, overshadowed by, the Holy Spirit, Mary is bursting with Joy. In haste she travels to the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognizes the Lord in Mary’s womb. John the Baptist, in Elizabeth’s womb, leaps for Joy. We all rejoice in God our savior in and through the Holy Spirit. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Exegesis (Continued):

1 Thes 5:16-24

St. Paul links rejoicing, praying and gratitude. “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.” (For additional examples of this correlation see 1 Thess: 3:9-10, Phil. 4:6, Col. 2:7, 3:15-17). The Holy Spirit is that connection of the human soul and divine life. God is not a being but being itself and the human soul is the receptor of, a personal sharing in, being itself. God is the source of our joy, prayer is the connection between ourselves and God, and gratitude follows.

Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Our Gospel today is taken from the beautiful prologue of John’s Gospel. Who Jesus is as the Eternal Word made flesh is clearly revealed to the world. John the Baptist is not this person. He is a person sent by God to witness to Him. He is not the light. Verse 9 (not included in today’s Gospel) clarifies that Jesus is the True Light. The Greek word that we translate as true is *alēthinos* which means real divinely given reality. It connotes a solid and immutable reality of which God is the source. John the Baptist is not the true light, but he was sent by God to testify to, to point out, to prepare the way for the true light, Jesus. Later Jesus would clearly reveal Himself as this truth when He proclaimed, “I AM the Light of the World.”

In a similar vein John declares himself not the Christ, (*Mesiah* Hb., *Christos* Gk.) He declares himself to be the voice of one crying out in the desert. He is not the Word, the Eternal Logos, He is merely a singular voice sent by God to proclaim the true Light, and the true Word. He is not the way, but again points to the Way. Again, would clearly reveal Himself as God when He proclaims, “I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

John declares that his baptism is one of repentance, i.e., preparing for human life to interact with divine life. In this pericope there is a great articulation of the relationship between creature and creator, between us and God. What are the consequences of God assuming our fallen human nature, of grace entering flesh, it can only be the transformation, the raising up of, our unworthiness. The incarnation is God’s initiative and begs our response.

Reflection:

My Dear Friends in Christ,

Our Responsorial Psalm this weekend is part of the great hymn of Mary that we call the Magnificat, "My soul rejoices in God my Savior." The prophet Isaiah foreshadows her proclamation, "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul." St. Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians proclaims, "Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always." Our Gospel Acclamation quotes the words of Jesus taken from the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." In our Gospel John the Baptist points to our source of joy, "the One who is coming..."

As we move closer to the coming of our Savior at Christmas we are called to look forward with joy. We celebrate this weekend what is often referred to as Gaudete (Gau- dae-tae) Sunday. Gaudete is a Latin word that means "rejoice". We pause from our purple penitential mode and light the pink candle as a sign of our rejoicing and joy.

At the Last Supper the beloved disciple John captures some of the most beautiful words of Jesus that we call the Last Supper Discourse. In those beautiful words of Jesus, He talks about the coming of another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He talks about the indwelling of this Spirit in our hearts and souls. He prayed, "Father may they be one as You and I are one." He gives us the wonderful metaphor of the Vine and the Branches. He talks about the gift of the sharing of divine life. As He was about to walk out into the Garden of Gethsemane to begin His journey of the Cross, Jesus said: "I tell you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy might be complete."

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22)

I see a huge disconnect in our world today. The attempt to remove Christ from Christmas is a part of the greater movement to take God out of our lives. "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves," St. Augustine always said. God is the ground of our being the source of our very life. We can no more take God out of our lives, than a goldfish can take the water out of it's bowl. If it could, the results would be the same... death. The visible result of the disconnect from the Holy Spirit is the absence of His fruits, i.e., love, JOY... Some well-respected sociologists are calling our present era perhaps one of saddest times in recorded human history. The opposite of joy goes even deeper. It is the absence of life that should be there. It is emptiness.

In His first letter to the world, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis called everyone to return to rejoicing in God our Savior. The Gospel is GOOD NEWS! And we are called to proclaim that God News with our lives. We are called to herald the God News from the rooftops. Born for us is a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord!

His body given up for us (white) and His blood poured out for us (red) come together on our Altar. Just as red and white form pink, Jesus is the source of our joy. Come and enter the mystery of His indwelling life. Become what you receive, the Body of Christ, and rejoice always in God our Savior. He is the joy of our soul.



Personal Witness:

Early in my priesthood I was asked to meet with a young person who was really struggling. This young man was in his early twenties and was struggling with alcohol and drug addictions. His struggles caused him to be expelled from 2 different colleges. At the insistence of his parents, he attempted several recovery programs and ultimately failed each time. He attempted suicide on multiple occasions.

Meeting with a priest was the last thing that he wanted. He did not want to be there. Nonetheless, I prayed hard and gave it my best shot. As I talked to him, he looked sad and distant. I felt a heaviness, and a darkness, that I had never experienced before. Was it the presence of evil? He claimed to be an atheist. When I asked him what gave him passion in life, he could not answer.

That night after the meeting I could not get him out of my mind. As I sat in prayer it occurred to me that what I was experiencing was emptiness. When I observed the darkness of his eyes it was like there was nothing there. I was struck by the fact that what I was seeing is the opposite of what Jesus called the fullness of life. Jesus said, "I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest." (Jn. 10:10)

It seems to me that the opposite of the abundant life is not death, it is nothingness or emptiness. As I contemplated that dichotomy it occurred to me that the opposite of Joy is not sadness, it is emptiness. Similarly, the opposite of the other fruits of the Holy Spirit, like love and peace is emptiness as well. The opposite of love is apathy, from the Greek word *a pathos*, which literally means no passion, an absence of love. The opposite of peace, *shalom*, is not war or discord, it also is emptiness, an absence of peace.

At the Last Supper, as Jesus promised the gift of His indwelling presence, the gift of the Holy Spirit, he talked about His love, joy, and peace dwelling within us. As He was about to walk into the Garden of Gethsemane He said, "I tell you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy might be complete." (Jn. 15:11) In our first reading this weekend the Prophet Isaiah proclaims, "in my God is the joy of my soul." Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. God is the source of love, and joy and peace.

Sadly, when I look into the eyes of people today, I often see the same emptiness that I saw in that young man 25 years ago. The rate of suicide today is off the charts. It is not just young people who are struggling today, it is an epidemic afflicting all age groups. It seems to be especially affecting people in late middle age. God is what we need! Spread the word... God is what we need!

From my own experience I can say that when I was there years ago, I did not even realize that it was God whom I needed. Something was missing in my life, and I did not know what it was. It was not until I rediscovered that Joy, the Joy of the Holy Spirit, that I realized what I was missing. The greatest gift we can bring to those around us this holiday season is to lead them to Jesus. Each one of us must do our part to spread the Love, Joy and Peace that Jesus brings to earth. One of the rules of what Bishop Barron calls spiritual physics is this: the more love you give the more love you experience, the more joy you give the more joy you experience, the more peace you bring the more peace you experience. The source is infinite and inexhaustible! It is highly contagious! Let's start a pandemic of our own! Love, joy, and peace will spread faster than any strain of covid, and the outcome is better too!

F. Glenn