

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)

Third Sunday of Advent—Year A

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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 A

Reading 1

Isaiah 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.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.

R. (cf. Is 35:4) **Lord, come and save us.** or: R. **Alleluia.**
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.** or: R. **Alleluia.**

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. or: R. Alleluia.

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. or: R. Alleluia.

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.

Alleluia

Isaiah 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

Matthew 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."

Exegesis

Isaiah 11:1-10

When Isaiah was called, there was widespread infidelity to Yahweh. The prophet says it quite succinctly: “Ah! Sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil race, corrupt children! They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized.” (Is 1: 4). Despite their infidelity, the prophet always holds fast to the faithfulness of Yahweh, to His infinite love and mercy. “Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red they may become white as wool.” (Is 1: 18). As Isaiah links his mission, his calling, to Yahweh, Himself, it gives him the authority that he needs to deliver a message that might be difficult for many to hear. It not only gave Isaiah credibility, but it would give him courage and perseverance in a long and difficult battle against compromised religious practices. Isaiah, himself, has a feeling of unworthiness as he stands before Yahweh. Nevertheless, his purification occurs swiftly when the seraphim press a glowing ember from the altar against his mouth.

Chapter 35 of *Isaiah* is entitled *Israel’s Deliverance* in the NAB and *The Ransomed Shall Return* in the ESV. Many scholars feel that its composition occurred near the end of the Babylonian Exile and therefore should be included in *Deutero-Isaiah*. Chapter 34 speaks of the judgement upon Edom. Edom was a nation to the south and east that pillaged the land of the Israelites after they were defeated and dispersed by the Babylonians. With the destruction of Edom, the path of desolate land now extends south of Israel through the Arabah desert.

The Prophet Isaiah has a vision of the powerful saving hand of God restoring the Promised Land. His first call is for people to fear not and to be strong. They are encouraged to have faith in the saving power of God to save and restore their lives and their land. Streams of living water will burst from the parched desert floor. Life will spring forth. Deafness and blindness will be healed. The mute tongue will sing for joy as salvation breaks forth.

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 Hebrew word that is translated as *abundant flowers* in this verse is *habasselet*. *Habasselet* describes a *crocus* or a *meadow-saffron flower*. This verse and the entire pericope contrast with the wasteland of Edom as a result of the Lord’s judgment on Edom. “Edom’s steams shall be changed into pitch and her earth into sulfur, and her land shall become burning pitch.” (Is 34: 9). The salvation of God includes all of creation.

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. The Hebrew word that is translated as *fear* in this verse is *yirah*. *Yirah* can describe craven fear, but when in relationship to God it most always means *reverence* and *awe*. “So, strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.” (Heb 12: 12).

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. “He (Jesus) has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (Mk 7: 37). “The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel.” (Mt 15: 31).

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. This verse is repeated later in *Deutero-Isaiah*. “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.” (Is 51: 11). *Revelation* describes this restored redeemed world as follows: “He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” (Rev 21: 4).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.

Psalm 146 is an individual hymn of praise to God. It consists of 10 verses and is titled in the NAB *Trust in God the Creator and Redeemer* and in the ESV *Put Not Your Trust in Princes*. It begins and ends with the exclamation *Hallelujah!* *Hallelujah* is a Hebrew word that means to give exaltation with praise and thanksgiving. The entire psalm is a song of praise and thanksgiving to God as creator, as sustainer of life, and as savior.

Verses 1 – 5 consist of praise to God the creator. The Psalm begins with the doxology, *Hallelujah! Praise the Lord my soul*. Verse 6 begins as follows: *The maker of heaven and earth and the seas and all that is in them*.

Verse 6b continues where our pericope begins, *It is the Lord who preserves fidelity forever*. The following verses praise the saving power of God, the salvific hand of God in human history, God the Savior. God setting people free from slavery and providing bread for the hungry recalls the power of God in the Exodus experience. The Prophet Isaiah connects the gift of sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf to the freeing of captives (See Isa 42:7, 61:1). Sing praise to Yahweh who comes to save His people, to set them free and to feed and sustain them on the journey.

The LORD God keeps faith forever; secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free. The Hebrew word that is translated as *Lord* in this verse and throughout the psalm is *Yahweh*. The word that is translated as *God* is *Elohim* in the original Hebrew. The psalmist glories in our God *who keeps faith (emet) forever*. The understanding of *emet* and later the Greek NT translation *pistis*, connotes more than an ascent of the mind and heart, more than a creed that we recite. Faith describes a mutual indwelling presence of divine and human life in the soul (*nepes*). Psalm 146 sings glory and praise and thanksgiving to our triune God who creates, sustains life and is savior. The Lord God is faithful forever.

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. The Lord our God rescues the blind and the bowed down, who protects the alien, the orphan and the widow and who shall reign forever through all generations. *Hallelujah!* “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 lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners.” (Is 61: 1).

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. “You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to Me, I will surely hear their cry.” (Ex 22: 21-22).

Deuteronomy provides a concise summary of our Psalm pericope: “For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome; who has no favorites, accepts no bribes; who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So, you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.” (Deut 10: 17-19).

Exegesis (Continued)

James 5:7-10

The Letter of James begins as follows: “James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion, greetings.” (Jas 1: 1). Some scholars suggest that the author was James, brother (cousin/relative) of the Lord as mentioned in Matthew 13:55. “Is He not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother named Mary and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas.” (Mt 13: 55). Paul recognized James, sometimes referred to as *James of Jerusalem*, as a leader and pillar of the early Church in Jerusalem. “James and Kephias and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas their right hands in partnership, that we should go to the Gentiles.” (Gal 2: 9). The Roman historian Josephus reported that James of Jerusalem was stoned to death in the year 62, under the direction of the High Priest Ananus II. (*Antiquities* 20, 9, 1 pp. 200-203). Other scholars suggest the *Letter of James* was written by a disciple of James at a later date.

The twelve tribes in the dispersion suggest that the early Church was under persecution in Jerusalem, and much like the Diaspora of the Exile, the people of God were scattered throughout the Mediterranean landscape.

Our pericope is titled *Patience and Oaths* in the NAB and *Patience in Suffering* in the ESV.

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The Greek word that is translated as *patient* in this and subsequent verses is *makrothymeō*. *Makrothymeō* is sometimes translated as *long-suffering*. *Makrothymeō* appears several times in the Greek OT to describe God waiting patiently for us, e.g., “Thus, in dealing with other nations, the Lord patiently (*makrothymeō*) waits until they reach the full measure of their sins before He punishes them.” (2 Mac 6: 14). St. Paul uses the word in his beautiful symphony on love. “Love is patient (*makrothymeō*), love is kind.” (1 Cor 13: 4). The expression *coming of the Lord* most often refers to the Parousia. “And the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Mt 24: 30). “In the same way when you see all these things, know that He is near, at the gates.” (Mt 24: 33). “They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen Him going into heaven.’” (Acts 1: 11). The coming of the Lord can also refer to our own personal judgement as we stand before 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. The people in biblical times were certainly close to the earth, with many making a living off of the land in various ways. Jesus, Himself, used very vivid agricultural examples in many of His parables. People experienced God in the transformative power of nature. They could see life and death unfolding before their eyes. Fall and spring rain were necessary for successful agricultural endeavors. Without adequate rain the wheat, barley, olive and grape crops would fail. In times of drought terrible famine often followed. They viewed both rain and sunshine as gifts from God. “He (Yahweh) will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.” (Deut 11: 14). “They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.’” (Jer 5: 24). “Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.” (Joel 2: 23).

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. “We must consider how to rouse

Exegesis (Continued)

James 5:7-10

one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom with some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Heb 10: 24-25). “The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” (1 Pt 4: 7). “Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds.” (Rev 22: 12).

Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. The Greek word that is translated in this verse as *hardship* is *kakopatheia*. *Kakopatheia* is also translated as *suffering, distress, misery, stress, perseverance, and endurance*. The Greek word that is translated as *patience* is again *makrothymeo*. Jesus also used the example of the prophets’ hardships and endurance in the Beatitudes. “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mt 5: 11-12).

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 11:2-11

The *Gospel of Matthew* moves from the infancy narratives to the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist along the Jordan River. The baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus follow. Then the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus takes center stage and it begins as follows: “When He (Jesus) heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew to Galilee.” (Mt 4: 12). After Jesus called His first disciples along the Sea of Galilee, He began to teach and to heal. Word of these miracles reached John the Baptist in prison.

The Roman historian Josephus recorded that John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas in a penal facility located at Machaerus, which was just east of the Jordan River. (*Antiquities* 8: 116-119). The Gospel account of the beheading of John the Baptist gives us a clue as to why Herod had him imprisoned. “Now Herod had arrested John, bound him and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, ‘It was not lawful for you to have her.’ Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people for they regarded him as a prophet.” (Mt 14: 3-5).

During the ministry of Jesus, John’s disciples were active. This is not first time that John’s disciples appear on the scene. “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” (Mt 9: 14). The fact that John sent his disciples to Jesus makes it apparent that he was able to communicate with at least some of them while imprisoned. John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus with questions that seemed filled with doubt.

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?" The one who is to come, the Messiah, was proclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah. “He shall come to Zion, a redeemer to those of Jacob who turn from sin, says the Lord. This is the covenant with them which I Myself have made, says the Lord.” (Is 59: 20-21). Similar to the Apostles, John the Baptist struggles to understand the mission of the Messiah. Scholars suggest that there was no real consensus as to the role of the Messiah. Many thought, or wished for, a strong political leader who would set them free from oppression.

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." By His words and actions, Jesus defines who He is as the long-awaited Messiah. He is not a political force, He is fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah relative to the Messiah. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.” (Is 35: 5-6). “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” (Is 61: 1). The miracles listed appear as follows in Matthew’s Gospel: the blind (8:27-30), lame (8:5-13; 9:1-7), leper (8:1-4), deaf (8:32-34), poor (5:3), and dead (9:18-26).

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." Jesus turns from the disciples of John the Baptist and addresses the crowd. In this short passage Jesus further defines Himself and John the Baptist. If the people are looking in royal palaces for the Messiah, they are looking in the wrong place. Jesus then confirms the prophesy of Isaiah and Malachi. “A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made plain, the rough country, a broad valley.” (Is 40: 3-4). “Lo, I am sending My messenger to prepare the way before Me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming says the Lord of hosts.” (Mal 3: 1).

Reflection

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 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 Gethsemani to begin His journey to 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.

On an even deeper level, I believe that the opposite of joy is not sadness, it is emptiness. I see an alarming emptiness in our world today. Without God in our lives and in our hearts we are an empty shell. As such many people are existing and not really living life to the full. God is what we need.

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 New 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 the color pink, Jesus is the source of our joy. Come and enter into 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.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,



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 seeing in him 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!

