

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 13, 2020 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God of History and Time, you promised a Savior who brings good news, freedom, and joy to the humble of heart. Give us a humble spirit to listen attentively to your voice, to discern your truth in all situations, and to be an instrument to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. We pray through your Holy Spirit who guides us and teaches us your ways. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: This coming weekend is Gaudete ("Let us rejoice!") Sunday. We will light the rose candle on our Advent wreath. There is a clear theme of joy in the First and Second Readings and in the Psalm. In the Gospel, John wants his readers to be very clear that he is not the Messiah, but the one preparing people to receive the Messiah.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Our First Reading is from Third Isaiah (chs 56-66) in which he preaches to exiles who have *returned* from Babylon to a devastated land.

He begins by speaking of his call "*The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me.*" Then he describes his mission:

*"God has sent me to bring
glad tidings to the poor
and to heal the brokenhearted...."*

These are the words Jesus uses to describe his mission (Lk 4:14-21).

The "I" in "*I rejoice heartily*" seems to be a reference to Jerusalem, who is full of joy that God has come to forgive her sins and to restore her to righteousness. The prophet uses *spousal imagery* to describe Israel's covenantal relationship with God ("*...like a bride bedecked with her jewels*").

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

The Psalm is taken from Mary's Magnificat. Mary's joy at God's goodness to her echoes the joy of Jerusalem and points to the joy of all who will open their hearts to Christ.

SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul concludes this letter to the people of Thessalonica with a note of *joy*. Just as they accept God's Word with joy (which is one of the fruits of the Spirit), so must their lives continue to be marked by joy even in the midst of their afflictions. Paul emphasizes the importance of a grateful heart and openness to the Holy Spirit ("*Do not quench the Spirit.*"). But they should not embrace every new fad ("*Test everything; retain what is good.*"). Paul concludes with a prayer for his people: "*May the God of peace make you perfectly holy.*"

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 1:6-8, 19-28

As we listen to this First Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this Second Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Last Sunday, Luke introduced us to John the Baptist. This Sunday, John the Evangelist *contrasts* the role of John the Baptist with the mission of Jesus. John the Evangelist is writing to a community, *some* of whom still believe that John the Baptist is the Messiah. John the Evangelist wants his people to be very clear that John the Baptist's ministry is *temporary* and *subordinate* to that of Christ's. John is a *witness* to the Light. Jesus is *the* Light. Three times John says: "*I am not the Light.*" When asked who he is, John replies: "*I am a voice pointing people to Jesus who is the Light.*" The "Jerusalem Jews" (some Pharisees who came in delegations to question Jesus) are the ones who constantly prefer the darkness to the light. They do not recognize Christ in their midst.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. What gives you joy? What steals your joy? What can help you live a more joyful life?
3. Paul exhorts us to 'give thanks in all circumstances' and to 'not quench the spirit.' Would you consider yourself a grateful person? What are some ways we can quench the movement of the spirit in our lives?
4. How is your Advent Season coming?
5. What is Jesus saying to you this Sunday about how a faithful disciple should act?

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Practice gratitude and joyfulness this week.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it; take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Lord, you have given us your Holy Spirit to guide and direct us. May we learn how to notice the Spirit's promptings in our daily lives. Amen.*

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are you grateful for? For what and for whom do you wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*God of joy,
fill our hearts with joy.
Help us to be grateful in
all circumstances.
Help us to bring your light
to the world.
Amen.*