

## **Bible Study**

### **Second Sunday of Advent, cycle C**

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Lord God, when your people wandered in the darkness of sin, you sent the True Light to show the way of faithfulness and to reveal to them the God whom they longed to know. The darkness of sin lures us too sometimes from the path of life. Reveal yourself to us again today in your Word and light our path with your truth so that we might prepare well for your coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

#### **Focusing Questions**

1. When or how did God bless you in a special way this week?
2. Talk about an experience of waiting, which you have had to endure.

#### **Commentary before the First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9**

We rarely read at Sunday Mass from the Book of the Prophet Baruch, the man who was Jeremiah’s scribe, his secretary. Writing during the great exile of many Jewish people to Babylonia, Baruch spoke to “Jerusalem” as one would to a human person because the city was synonymous with the Jewish people as a whole. His message is one of hope, not condemnation; one of promise, not of punishment.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Which emotion(s) will characterize the people as they return from Babylon?
2. At times, in those days, the subjects of royalty would go ahead of them to level the ground so that the men who carried the royal “carriage” would walk smoothly. What does Baruch’s use of that image say about God’s feelings toward his exiled people?
3. In poetic language, how does Nature even reflect the joyful mood of the people’s return to their homeland?
4. Which words in verse 3 proclaim that the exile of this nation’s people will be used for a greater good?
5. What sort of robe will replace Jerusalem’s “robe of mourning”? What does this say about how the Jewish people will begin to conduct themselves, as opposed to their earlier infidelity to God’s laws?

#### **Commentary before the Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11**

Saint Paul was himself in a type of exile (in a prison) when he wrote the letter to the Church at Philippi. Yet, like Baruch, he too is full of hope and joy. It would be difficult to miss the affection with which Paul addresses the people of this faith community. The knowledge that he speaks about in verse 9 does not mean intellectual activity, but rather refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit which helps us to know about God and God’s ways, to know what is of value, and to recall information when we need it for another’s benefit.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Find the 2 reasons for St. Paul’s joy and thankfulness every time he prayed for the Philippians.
2. And then what does he ask God for, when he prays for the Philippians?
3. When did God begin “a good work” in them – and in you, for that matter?
4. In order to fulfill his prayer, where must their love (and ours) be directed?
5. What will be the result of living the kind of life Paul describes in verses 9-11?
6. Which word near the end of the First Reading means the same as “righteousness” in this one?

#### **Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-6**

St. Luke is unique among the evangelists for the way that he places the story of Jesus within a historical context as well. The reigns of the political and the religious leaders mentioned overlapped by only a few years, helping historians to determine the time of Jesus’ earthly birth within just a few years. Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas will all appear later in the story, attempting to stall the mission of Jesus, but to no avail. The story of the birth of John the Baptist was already told in Chapter 1, so no further introduction was needed at this point of Luke’s Gospel. John was ready to step forward and fulfill God’s purpose for his life, since the appropriate time had come.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Speak aloud a word or verse that caught your attention. Comment if you wish.
2. Where was John living when he felt the Holy Spirit calling him to his prophetic work? What was he doing there?

3. When John appears on the scene, which of the three “advents” of Jesus is he announcing: his imminent birth, the daily presence of the Messiah among the people, or the second coming of Christ on the last day?
4. How were the people supposed to prepare for that arrival of the Messiah?
5. In the original quotation from the Book of Isaiah, whose voice was the one crying in the desert?
6. Which image(s) in the quotation from the prophet Isaiah was/were also found in the First Reading today?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. Which of the three Theological Virtues would you say is the focus of today’s readings: faith, hope, or charity?
2. Do you believe that God continues to bless us, even in the “desert” times, the “exile” times, the “prison” times of our lives? If so, how do we experience that blessing?
3. Why is it sometimes so hard to notice God’s blessing during those difficult times of life?
4. All three readings speak of the way God’s uses ordinary people to accomplish “good work.” What sort of “good work” is God accomplishing through your life?
5. The First Reading is also a reading about repentance and conversion. How do repentance and conversion help us to be more loving and faith-filled people? (This is the value of frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.)
6. What “darkness” in your life would you like to leave behind forever this Christmas?

### **Closing Prayer**

Jesus, my Lord, you are my hope; in you I place all my trust. For you are faithful to your promises, and on the day of distress I shall not be abandoned. Therefore, my mouth is filled with your praise, and day by day my hope pushes me to praise you more and more. Increase my love for you, strengthen my ability to discern what is of value, and fill my life with the fruit of righteousness. Amen.