

Scripture Study

Third Sunday of Advent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

(Ps) Luke 1:46-50,53-54

1 Thes 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday, the third in Advent, is called “Gaudete (Joyful) Sunday” from the Entrance Antiphon which calls us to “Rejoice!” (from Philippians 4:4).
- The Gospel reading is pieced together from the first chapter of John. While most of this beautiful and profound hymn touches on the mystery of the person of Jesus (verses 1-5, 9-14, 16-18), this Sunday’s verses concern the identity and mission of John the Baptist.
- John was just as important for who he was (verse 23; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1, 23) as for who he was not (verse 20-21; Deuteronomy 18:15). Great as he was, he was only a precursor to One who was even then in their midst—Jesus, the Messiah.
- Even though John denied he was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was expected to return to precede the Messiah (verse 21), Jesus seemed to state otherwise (see Matthew 11:13-14; Mark 9:11-13). John *could* be said to be Elijah—in role and spirit (Luke 1:17).
- John’s baptism was for repentance only (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4). Different from both the Old Testament ritual washings and ablutions (Leviticus 14:8; Numbers 19:17-21; John 11:5) AND from the New Testament sacrament of regeneration (Acts 2:37-38; John 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Jesus himself would establish this baptism in fire and the Holy Spirit.

Questions:

- The 1st Reading is one of the most well-known Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. How many images of Christ do you see fulfilled in this passage?
- In the 2nd Reading, St. Paul exhorts us to “Rejoice always”. He then goes on to give several directives. How are each of these directives related to or a result of a Christian spirit of joy?
- In the Gospel Reading, what questions do the priests and Levites ask John? Those sent by the Pharisees? What do these questions reveal about the reason they were sent?
- What is John’s purpose in life (verses 22-23, 26-27; see also Isaiah 40:3-5)?
- How does John finally answer their question about his baptism (verses 30-31)? What does he mean by calling Jesus the “Lamb of God” (verse 29; see Exodus 12:1-13; Isaiah 53:7) and the “Son of God” (verse 34)? What proof supports these claims (Psalm 2:7)?
- Do we know our role before Jesus? Do we need a reality check of who is who?
- How do we need to *decrease* so that the proper place of Jesus in our lives may *increase*? Do we need to kindle (or rekindle) our dependence on God?
- Where in our lives can we “make straight the way of the Lord” (verse 23; Isaiah 40:3-5)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 523-24, 717-720

Closing prayer

“Do penance,” says St. John, “make low these mountains of pride; fill up these ditches of tepidity and cowardice.” The valley the glorious St. John wants us to fill up is fear, which when excessive, tends to discouragement, making us recall past sins. Fill up the valleys; fill your hearts with confidence and hope, because salvation is at hand. –St. Francis de Sales

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

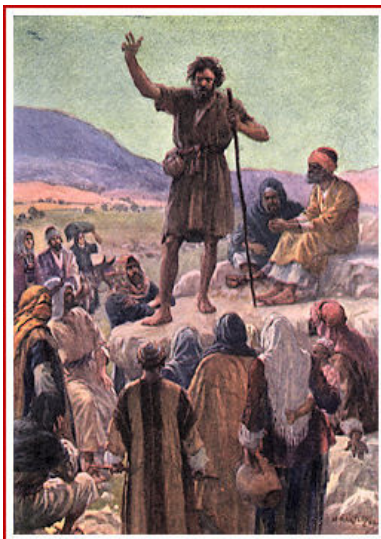
Who are you? And in whose name do you speak?

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

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2,10-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's



favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Meditation: "Who are you?" John the Baptist had no difficulty answering this question when the religious authorities came to investigate him. If someone called your identity into question, how would you answer? Do you know your roots, your true identity as God knows it? We often mistake our true identity for something that's manufactured. True identity is derived; its source and maker is God who made us in his own image. When the Jewish leaders questioned John's identity, they wanted to know if he was really sent by God. John claimed to speak in God's name and act as his representative. The religious leaders wanted to know if John claimed to be the Messiah or one of the great prophets who was expected to return and announce the Messiah's arrival (see Malachi 4:5, Deuteronomy 18:15). John had no mistaken identity. In all humility and sincerity he said he was only a voice bidding people to get ready for the arrival of the

greatest Ruler of all, God's anointed King and Messiah. John the Baptist bridges the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament Prophets who points the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. He is the herald who prepares the way for Jesus and who announces his mission to the people: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!* John saw from a distance what the Messiah came to accomplish — our redemption from slavery to sin and our adoption as sons and daughters of God, our heavenly Father. Do you recognize your identity as a child of God and a citizen of heaven?

John was the greatest of the prophets, yet he lived as a humble and faithful servant of God. He pointed others to Jesus, the true Messiah and Savior of the world. The Christian church from the earliest of times has given John many titles which signify his mission: *Witness of the Lord, Trumpet of Heaven, Herald of Christ, Voice of the Word, Precursor of Truth, Friend of the Bridegroom, Crown of the Prophets, Forerunner of the Redeemer, Preparer of Salvation, Light of the Martyrs, and Servant of the Word.* Do you point others to Jesus Christ by the example and witness you give to others?

"Lord Jesus, make me a herald of your word of truth and grace. Help me to be a faithful witness of the joy of the gospel and to point others to you as John did through his testimony."

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