

Third Sunday of Advent, 17 December 2023

Scriptures: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we find Isaiah telling us that God's spirit brings us great joy. (Today is traditionally known as *Gaudete* [Rejoice] Sunday.)

Isaiah prophesizes that those who are poor will receive good news, that those with broken hearts will be healed, and that prisoners will be freed and justice will reign.

In the first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul suggests that at all times and in all circumstances we are to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks to God.

In the Gospel reading, we find John the Baptist telling us that God is quietly present in the world, and that he, John, is simply "a witness to speak for the Light".

On this Gaudete Sunday, even amidst the worldwide tragedy of the coronavirus pandemic, we are reminded of the call to rejoice. "Be happy at all times" says St. Paul. We are called to have so much hope in our hearts and trust in God, that we are able to do this in good times and in bad. Paul urges us to nourish the spiritual dimension of our lives and to learn to be more sensitive to God's presence among us.

The first reading and the responsorial psalm which is taken from Mary's Magnificat, foretell that poor people and social outcasts have particular reason to be happy. In fact, God has taken an option for those who are poor: prisoners will be freed, those who are starving will be fed, and the broken-hearted will be healed.

The text from Isaiah is the one Jesus read out when he began his public ministry, offering “good news to the poor” and proclaiming a time of grace or Jubilee. Mary, too, in the responsorial psalm, places herself in the context of a new and just world that is dawning.

In the Gospel, we sense a feeling of anticipation growing among the people. They were beginning to reform their lives, expecting that at any moment the Christ might be revealed to them. They believed that God was faithful, generous, and close to them. They had every reason to rejoice.

Does this mean we should go about our daily lives with a constant smile on our face? Well, perhaps we could smile more often than we do. We certainly could smile at the colorful designs of some people’s face masks. More importantly, we could be more willing to focus on our blessings rather than on our problems.

As Advent progresses and Christmas draws near, we can have a heightened awareness of God’s presence among us and openness to being changed and blessed by it.

Advent is a time to prepare not only materially but also spiritually for the coming of Jesus Christ. It is a time to step outside our busy lives, our tasks and appointments, and simply recognize God’s loving presence in all humanity and in the natural world. Let us pay special attention to the gift of family and friends. And as we give thanks for God’s gifts to us, let’s ask ourselves how we can be of service to people who are sick or in trouble, or worried about facing Christmas on a low income. Can we give time to people who may be depressed or who do not have many friends? As Christmas draws near, let us glorify God for sending Christ to walk alongside us on this Earth. Let us resolve that this year’s Christmas celebration will be a heartfelt and generous community celebration of divine love.