

Third Sunday of Advent – December 16, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: Zep 3:14-18A

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against
you he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with
gladness, and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Responsorial Psalm: IS 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

**R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for
among you is the great and Holy One of
Israel.**

God indeed is my savior; I am confident and
unafraid. My strength and my courage is the
LORD, and he has been my savior. With joy
you will draw water at the fountain of
salvation.

**R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for
among you is the great and Holy One of
Israel.**

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his
name; among the nations make known his
deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name.

**R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for
among you is the great and Holy One of
Israel.**

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious
achievement; let this be known throughout
all the earth. Shout with exultation, O city of
Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One
of Israel!

**R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for
among you is the great and Holy One of
Israel.**

Second Reading: Phil 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters:
Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again: rejoice!
Your kindness should be known to all.
The Lord is near.
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all
understanding will guard your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: LK 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist,
“What should we do?” He said to them in reply,
“Whoever has two cloaks should share with the
person who has none. And whoever has food
should do likewise.” Even tax collectors came
to be baptized and they said to him, “Teacher,
what should we do?” He answered them, “Stop
collecting more than what is prescribed.”
Soldiers also asked him, “And what is it that we
should do?” He told them, “Do not practice
extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be
satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts whether
John might be the Christ. John answered them
all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but
one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy
to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his
threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his
barn, but the chaff he will burn with
unquenchable fire.” Exhorting them in many
other ways, he preached good news to the
people.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The question, "What shall we do?" found in this week's Gospel reading arose from John the Baptist's exhortation to "bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance." We must keep in mind that John, as the forerunner of Jesus, prepared people to receive him as Lord and Christ. During Advent we also anticipate the arrival of Jesus, the Christ, hoping that he will be birthed afresh in our hearts and lives, bringing a new awareness of the hope of salvation. Consequently, this passage provides insight as to how we might prepare to receive him.

It is interesting that John relates repentance first with action rather than simply having deep feelings of regret. The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary supports this position by listing as the first definition of repentance, "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life." It is only when we look at the second definition that we encounter feelings of "regret and contrition," and "change of one's mind." Obviously, both aspects of repentance are important, however John's use of repentance emphasizes action and a change of behavior, and not simply inner feelings which can easily be forgotten once we arise from our knees.

Many might question whether this imperative to change our sinful behavior is really "good news." Perhaps one would be justified to think this way, had John's message stopped there, but it didn't. John also foretold the impending appearance of another messenger from God who was to be more important and powerful than himself, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now that is good news! The Holy Spirit, who is a gift to us from the Father and the Son, is an integral part of the good news of Jesus' first advent. The Holy Spirit is the means to the end; release from captivity to sin and to rebirth into a life with God. He is the indwelling power for changing our inclinations, enabling us to break old habits of sin and replace them with new habits of righteousness. This space is too small to even begin to reiterate all the grace and gifts that come with his presence, but suffice it to say that they are manifold. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Because we are dead or at least wounded through sin the first effect of the gift of love is the forgiveness of our sins. The communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church restores to the baptized the divine likeness lost through sin. He, then, gives us the 'pledge' or 'first fruits' of our inheritance; the very life of the Holy Trinity, which is to love as 'God [has] loved us.' This love... is the source of the new life in Christ, made possible because we have received 'power' from the Holy Spirit." *

As Christians we too often forget this aspect of the Good News which Jesus brought. He has imparted to us the Holy Spirit. This constant companion and intercessor helps us to experience real incarnational life in Christ. This Third Week of Advent should remind us of this message of hope and gift of enablement. Additionally, it should renew us in his love, and prepare us to open our hearts wholly to him.

* Taken from Catechism of the Catholic Church, Sections 733-735.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading — Zephaniah 3:14-18

1. Why should we not fear or be faint hearted?
2. What does the phrase “the Lord s in your midst” convey to you?

Second Reading — Philippians 4:4-7

3. How does prayer, supplication and thanksgiving transform our anxieties into peacefulness?
4. How do you think the peace of God is expressed or experienced in one’s life?

Gospel Reading — Luke 3:10-18

5. In verses 10-14 John expresses several behavioral changes. What corresponding change in attitude is necessary to sustain these behavioral changes?
6. What do John’s statements in verses 15-17 intimate about the nature of Jesus and his ministry?
7. Explain as best you can your understanding of what sacred Scripture and the Church teach about the baptism of the Holy Spirit

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.