



AMDG
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
YEAR B
17TH DECEMBER 2017



Rejoice in the Lord always!

OPENING PRAYER

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always with solemn worship
and glad rejoicing.

This Sunday's readings are full of joy and hope, for we have a glimpse of the joy of our approaching redemption.

Isaiah, in the *First Reading*, announces the redemption of Jerusalem, clothed in the bridal robes of justice and integrity. Jesus quoted this text to describe his mission, and it also prefigured Mary's role in our salvation.

The *Responsorial Psalm* is the song of Mary's Magnificat. It is a joyful hymn of praise to God for his holiness, his mercy and his faithfulness in bringing the salvation promised to his people.

St Paul's sentiments in the *Second Reading* echo this. He encourages the Thessalonians – and us – to be happy, to pray constantly, to give thanks to God and to be open to the Spirit as we wait for the coming of the Lord. God has called us, and he will not fail us.

This Sunday, we again meet John the Baptist in the *Gospel*. John the Evangelist insists on the Baptist's role as witness to the light. He is a witness, a voice, but not the Messiah. The Messiah is here, amongst us, but we do not know him.

In this year's very short Advent season, let us benefit to the full this week, as we listen to all the voices that witness to Christ unknown among us.

SECOND READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 5: 16–24

Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus.

Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything – hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and he will not fail you.

As I settle to pray I come before my God just as I am.

I take a deep breath.

How do I feel?

I try to relax in spirit, soul and body.

Whether I feel happy and peaceful, or anxious and fearful,

I place myself in God's hands, trusting in his compassion and love.

I breathe gently, allowing myself to be open to the Spirit.

I read the text slowly and prayerfully.

Am I able to tap into the happiness Paul speaks of, sensing that it is there, despite the pressures and tensions of my life?

Perhaps giving thanks 'for all things' will lighten my heart, as I consider all the blessings the Lord has given me ...

I may spend some time in gratitude to the Lord.

I pray and ponder the coming of Christ,

as he comes to me now,

and I may ask for the gift of peace and holiness ...

I speak to him from my heart.

I also think of his coming this Christmas and at the end of time, and I pray for the world and for all those I love.

'God has called me, he will not fail me'.

I may carry these words with me this week, and try to find a few quiet moments in the general pre-Christmas rush to reflect on them.

I gently conclude my prayer with a slow *Our Father*.

GOSPEL: JOHN: 1: 6–8, 19–28

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, ‘I am not the Christ.’ ‘Well then,’ they asked, ‘are you Elijah?’ ‘I am not,’ he said. ‘Are you the Prophet?’ ‘He answered, ‘No’. So they said to him, ‘Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?’ So John said, ‘I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.’

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, ‘Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?’ John replied, ‘I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.’

This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

I come to my place of prayer. I may light a candle, and slowly become aware of God’s presence in and around me.

When I am ready, I read the Gospel passage slowly a couple of times.

I consider John the Baptist. Perhaps I try to be in the scene, looking and listening. How does he witness to the light?

Even a small candle lights up the darkness. In the darkness of our world, am I able to believe and trust in God’s light? I speak to the Lord, maybe asking him to shed his light in me.

I watch John, and listen to him refusing to accept any title or category – he is a voice in the wilderness. Am I able to witness in simplicity and honesty, allowing God’s light to shine rather than my own?

Can I move out into the wilderness, into the margins?

Or is the Lord asking something else of me? Quietly, I listen ...

John says, ‘I am not’. Jesus is the ‘I am’. Am I able to see Jesus – the one who is – in everyone and in everything around me?

Or do I feel at times that he is still ‘unknown’ to me in my life?

I spend some time in gratitude to the Lord who is always coming, and is always present, known or unknown. I end my prayer with a slow *Glory be* ...

Here's a text if you've only got a minute ...

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor. *First Reading*

For all things give thanks to God. *Second Reading*

John came as a witness, to speak for the light. *Gospel*

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your Church:
the earth rejoices in the hope of the Saviour's coming
and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time.
Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness that hinders us from
feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow,
for he is Lord for ever and ever. *Old Opening Prayer*

This week's texts if you want to reflect further
Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11; Psalm: Luke 1: 46-50, 53-54;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28



**I exult for joy
in the Lord!**



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