

Lectionary Sunday Readings Study

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Cycle C – December 5th, 2021



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Our God is a God of power and goodness, who loves us and knows our souls.*

All: We praise you, Lord, and we trust in you.

Leader: *God, you chose to open wide the doors of your compassion:*

All: Do not let us stray from the path of true life.

Leader: *Let us call the Holy Spirit:*

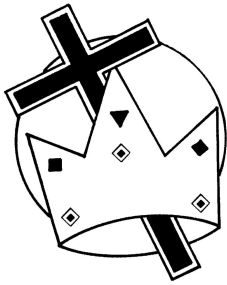
All: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen

FIRST READING [Baruch 5 (1-9)]

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.



*Righteous Peace,
Godly Glory.*

Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God. The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company.

The Book of Baruch was probably written in the second century B.C. although it has the name of the secretary of prophet Jeremiah, who had lived in the IV Century B.C. This is an interesting book because it contains a variety of text written in different literary styles.

Toward the end of the book we find this passage; it is a call to hope. The unknown author sets the time as one of the most dramatic moments in the history of his country, when Jerusalem and its magnificent temple were destroyed by the Babylonian invaders. The prophet discloses God's message that Jerusalem will be populated again by the Israelite people, and recover her freedom and glorious past.

The Israelites, driven to exile in pagan lands, would come back. The author writes with a special tone, not talking about the nation but of Jerusalem; and he addresses Jerusalem as if she were a person. This way, the message was well understood and accepted as a valid message of hope.

In the last paragraph we may find an image already used by prophet Isaiah: that the lofty hills will be made low and the lanes will be leveled, to ease the walk of the returning pilgrims. On this safe lane the people of God walk; they are the people to whom once again the Lord rescues and leads to the Promised Land.

- (1) Are there "lofty mountains" that should be made low today to make it possible for the salvation of many? Give examples.
- (2) Why would a message given 22 centuries ago maintain its strength and validity in our times?
- (3) The author calls the People of God "Jerusalem". What would you call our community if you had to address a message of hope like this one?

- (4) How would you spread the message of hope for today's people?
- (5) Let us review some ways we prepare for special events in our ordinary life. Which ones demand more attention?
- (6) After answering the previous question's exercise, let us do the same regarding the coming of the Lord this Christmas. Are we giving the same amount of attention to prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord who is coming?
- (7) And what about the second coming of the Lord? What should we do in order to prepare ourselves and the world for the Lord's new arrival?

SECOND READING [Philippians 1 (4-6), (8-11)]

Brothers and sisters: I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Christians in Philippi used to be very generous with Paul and supported his ministry of preaching the Gospel. In return, Paul was very fond of the Philippians. We may notice it in this letter, as we can see that behind the words there is a loving relationship between the apostle and those Christians. He uses a warm and confidential tone in this letter.

In all his letters, Paul opens with a greeting that includes a wish for peace and grace, followed by a thanksgiving prayer. In this letter we find that in addition, Paul makes a prayer over the Philippians and also congratulates them for their contribution to the evangelization work; Paul reviews the past, present and future to close with a reflection about the coming of the Lord.

The apostle emphasizes the coming of Christ with an invitation to live the present time with a Christian lifestyle. Living according to the teachings of Christ will let us approach the final judgment without anxiety and fear. Paul insists we have an attitude of love, which would be manifested by our deeds, with fruitful results. Let us remember that St. Augustine said that "...at the end we will be judged on how we loved..."

(1) We, as Christians, are living a permanent Advent. We know that Christ will come again. How can we apply Paul's words «... increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value... » in our preparation for Christ's Second Coming?

(2) Discerning consists in the experience of listening to the Holy Spirit in a given human situation. Do you think that a person who discerns in the Holy Spirit experiences Advent all the days of the year and not only in the four weeks preceding Christmas? Why?

GOSPEL [Luke 3 (1-6)]

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."



We may find in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus' genealogy, the details of his Incarnation (or the Annunciation story), how was Jesus' birth and also his infancy narrative. Indeed, it is Luke the evangelist who brings the most abundant information regarding Jesus' beginnings. In the third chapter of his gospel, we find this reference to John the Baptist. Although this author is not giving much information about Jesus Christ, every line aims toward the purpose of his book, which is to share the inspiration he's received from the Holy Spirit about our Savior. Luke is a good historian, but he writes the historic details in such way that we find ourselves suddenly realizing how God is present in every event of human history, especially in those event related to the salvation of the human genre.

John begins his mission after he receives the word of God and starts preaching a message of conversion and baptizes his followers, to those who accept his invitation to transform their hearts, to experience conversion. Luke quotes passages of the Old Testament to prove that what was happening is a confirmation of God's will and is related to His plan of salvation.

John the Baptist is not the main character, he just acts as a humble messenger of God. This is a very unusual piece of Gospel because Jesus is not even mentioned. The text is about John, but he doesn't become the subject of the text; it's his message that becomes important. John knows very well what his role is, and he acts accordingly. John's mission is to prepare the way of the Lord and he understands it as an invitation to transform our hearts in order to receive the most important visitor in the best possible way. Are we accepting John's invitation to prepare the way of the Lord more fully this year compared to previous years?



- (1) Read John 1 (19-31). Compare and comment. Are there differences?
- (2) Read John 3 (22-30). Compare and comment. What impresses you the most in this passage?
- (3) How do you understand the concluding sentence of the Gospel? («...and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.»)
- (4) After answering the previous question, let us consider the role of the Church in this promise.
- (5) As individual Christians, what can we do in order to contribute to bring the salvation to others?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and the end: We conclude this meeting and we lift up our hearts to, you, divine origin of all life.*

All: We give you thanks for the gift of being among us today. We give you thanks for the gift of fellowship, understanding, and mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your power and glory because we know that we may count with your assistance in the worries that we share. For these and many more gifts, we give you thanks.

Leader: *Hear O Lord our prayers* (here the faithful may present their petitions and the rest will respond, Lord hear our prayers)

All: In the same way you blessed us when we convened, we ask you, O lord, to bless us and keep us safe in our return to our homes, + in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Leader: *Let us go in the peace of Christ. Amen*

Deacon José Moronta jmoronta@stmarktampa.org

