

Lectionary Sunday Readings Study

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Cycle C – December 12th, 2021



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Rejoice and be glad in the Lord, all you people; shout unto God with a voice of triumph.*

All Sing and declare for His glory is here, rejoice and be glad in the Lord.

Leader: Come together everybody, come and worship, rejoice and be glad.

All: This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

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

This is “Rejoice! Sunday”

From the opening Antiphon to the concluding prayer, everything in this Sunday’s liturgy is an invitation to celebrate and be merry. This year we may listen to Paul’s text that provides the reason for this joyful spirit. The opening sentence of the second reading sets the scene to change the color purple to rose in the Advent wreath candles as well as in the celebrant’s vestments. What is the reason for this joyful spirit? The reason is that the Lord is coming soon, the Lord is near and we wait for him both with expectancy and with joy.

Many years ago, when the readings were in Latin, the word for “rejoice” was “Gaudete”. This is the reason why some times people refer to this as “Gaudete Sunday”

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.

This text-is addressed to Jerusalem, which will be rebuilt as the city where the Lord will dwell as king and savior. The text opens with command-like expressions that invite to rejoice: «*Shout for joy..*», «*.. Be glad and exult with all your heart...*». The cause of this happiness is that all Jerusalem’s enemies have been destroyed. These enemies are not necessarily from outside, but sometimes leaders of the same nation who because of their arrogance and selfishness had become adversaries for their own people. I like how this beautiful introduction concludes: «*... the Lord, is in your midst, you have not to fear...*»

Then, we notice a swift in the text, as it is now the Lord who speaks: «*...Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!...*» and to make the message stronger, we read now that the one who is rejoicing is the Lord himself: «*...The Lord, .. will rejoice over you with gladness, ...he will sing joyfully...*» Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord’s joy and his people’s joy melt together in one and unique feeling of gladness?

The people of God were struggling and hopeless, but God sent them his message of consolation and hope through the prophet. We are living difficult times, but the message remains the same: The lord loves us and wants the best for us. This message, addressed to the people of God more than twenty five centuries ago keeps its vigor and authority for us, Christians of the Third Millennium: Let us not be afraid, God loves us. The Lord is with us. We are a people of faith and hope. And based on this hope, we know that there is always a better day waiting for us ahead in our lives. Our expectation in that future day when the Lord will come again, allows our present day-by-day life to be full of meaning and power.

- (1) We read toward the end of this text that “*The Lord... will rejoice over you with gladness*”. Let us reflect and talk about this statement. How do you understand it?
- (2) How can we incite “*God gladness*”?
- (3) Have you ever been a herald of good news? When? Do you remember something special to be shared?
- (4) In those times of anxiety, fear, sadness, and also of happiness, how often do we remember to call to mind the presence of the Lord?

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

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.

Paul’s exhortation to «Rejoice in the Lord always» is based on our belief in the extraordinary event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his Passion and death. Right after an exhortation to be kind, the apostle affirms the reason for Christian hope: «*The Lord is near*». Every Christian lives open to that plentiful future that waits for us after the glorious return of Christ.

We Christians may call ‘hope’ what the world calls ‘optimism’; this is supported by Paul when he makes an invitation to overcome all anxiety. Instead of living agitated, we Christians have the Lord, to whom we may address our prayers and petitions, thanksgivings and our needs.

In every Mass, right after the Lord’s Prayer the priest recites the following: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day...” We might adopt this short prayer and repeat it many times along the day to remind us about the continuous presence of our Lord, next to us, bringing us a peace that only He can give. Isn’t this a solid reason to live as the apostle commands, to live always in joy?



- (1) Think and share your ideas about what Paul says: «...*the peace of God surpasses all understanding*...»
- (2) How do you understand the meaning of Emmanuel (God-with-us)?
- (3) When, where and how can we look for and find the *Peace of God*?
- (4) Compare differences between mere optimism and Christian hope.

GOSPEL [Luke 3 (1-6)]

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.

In this gospel we find two focal ideas. In the first one we find the explicit and direct discourse of John the Baptist about conversion. Then in the second paragraph we may read about the expectancy for the prophesied coming of the Messiah that was lived in those times, and then the announcement of John the Baptist promising that the Lord was closer than what they expected.



It is interesting how in the first paragraph we may read three times the question “What shall we do?” John’s listeners were interested in accepting his invitation to change their lives, and John’s answers were direct, clear and easy to follow. What’s most fascinating is that John’s words are still valid for us, twenty centuries later. We learn that the best possible way to welcome the Lord is by practicing love to others and exercising charity and social justice.

At Christmas time we see many times the word Peace in cards, banners, etc. And there is a risk that this word may be misused, losing its authentic meaning. It was Pope Paul VI who said that if we wanted peace we should work for justice. We cannot pretend to find peace when injustice is prevalent in our modern world. Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God here and now, but this cannot be accomplished while there is discrimination, privileges, abuse, etc. based on race, culture, gender, money or education. This situation might lead us to find answers to the question about what shall we do...

- (1) Read Acts 2:37 Do you find in it something in common with this Gospel's passage? What should be our personal response to these questions in order to get the best from this year's Advent preparation?
- (2) Check your closet: Are there too many unused clothes? Is there any excess? Would someone live better if you decided to share part of what you store in your closet or in your attic?
- (3) Tonight, before going to sleep, let us ask John to tell us what can bring us closer to the Lord; what obstacles must be removed from our life to prepare better the way of the Lord?

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*

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