

“See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.” Words from the 5th chapter of the letter of James from our second reading – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Today is known as Gaudete Sunday – literally “Rejoice Sunday.” The idea is that we are to take this time in the midst of our season of Advent to rejoice. Christmas will be here before we know it, but if we’re not careful, life just might pass us by in these days before Christmas - and we know hectic they can be: between the various social gatherings, the pressure to decorate and get the house ready for hosting, the baking, the gift getting and writing cards, overtime schedules at work, paying the bills, facing the in-laws... you know they made a song about this called the 12 Pains of Christmas. Maybe that’s the real reason why Advent is called a penitential season. And these things are besides whatever painful emotions we may be carrying in our hearts if this is the first holiday season without a spouse or a loved one, for example, or when the kids have moved away and new traditions are being started. We do know that we have some serious spiritual lifting to do as well as we prepare our souls to receive Jesus as we come to the sacrament of Reconciliation and straighten out our lives. So, this week of Advent, this “Rejoice Sunday”, is given as a service to us, reminding us, like the Mary Poppins song, that a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down in the most delightful way! Because it is so easy to get wrapped up in our preparations, that we forget what we are about, and why we are doing it; we forget that these things are for our happiness, that we ought to enjoy the moments that are unfolding before us here and now.

Even St. John the Baptist, whose whole life and ministry had been dedicated to preparing for the Lord’s coming, who recognized Jesus in his mother’s womb, who had himself baptized the Messiah and heralded his arrival, well, even he had a hard time of seeing and understanding what was actually happening in front of him as he sends his own disciples to question Jesus as to whether or not he was the indeed the Messiah. Why was that? What was giving the great prophet John the Baptist such doubts? John, like the rest of Israel, was expecting a different kind of Messiah. He was expecting someone powerful who would come in, overthrow the government, and restore Israel to its former glory as a nation. As in the past, that is how they believed God would accomplish all of His promises for peace, for freedom, for healing, for honor among nations for the people of Israel. It was a noble aspiration and hope, but that hadn’t happened yet. John, understandably, facing his own imprisonment and the possibility of martyrdom, was getting impatient. Jesus’ response to John and his disciples is telling. Jesus could have just said, ‘yeah it’s me, I’m the messiah,’ yet Jesus asks them to slow down and see what is unfolding around them, that something even better than they had envisioned is at hand. As we consider all the happenings surrounding Jesus, we see that the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, the mute speak, all while the good news of the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed and is

taking root in the heart of God's people. If John the Baptist stopped to think for a moment, he would realize that Jesus is, in fact, pretty powerful indeed! There aren't many people who can just run around with all this divine wisdom and knowledge, control the weather, change water into wine, feed thousands of people with practically nothing, and then work all these miracles day in and day out. And while Jesus didn't directly overthrow the Roman Empire, the Kingdom of God that he established has certainly stood the test of time, permeating every level of society and outlasting every other geopolitical entity besides. Not bad for a Messiah. So, Jesus is meeting and exceeding expectations, fulfillment is at hand! The invitation of Jesus is to wake up and smell the coffee or the roses or whatever; take it in! Indeed, it was all unfolding right before John's eyes.

Using the image of a farmer having to wait for the harvest, St. Paul thus reminds us today to be patient, to slow down, not to force things, to enjoy these precious, present moments, and see what is happening all around us. Slowing down is a conscious choice, and not always an easy one, but it leads to a greater appreciation for life and a greater level of joy. Think of the little girl from the Welch's Grape Juice Commercial who says, "I drink it slowly so I never miss a taste." That's some pretty convincing logic. Or think of that wise saying, "absence makes heart grow fonder." If we listen to our hearts in those moments, they are actually reaffirming for us just how much another means to us and the place they hold in our lives even while we are missing them. Or think of doing an escape room. If you are brilliant, perhaps you can shortcut through the puzzles in a matter of moments, but it's not as fun that way. This was the problem for our genius friends from the TV show Big Bang Theory and they wondered why they wasted all that money when they couldn't slow down to enjoy the atmosphere and the experience of it all. In contrast, the spoiled girl from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory with Gene Wilder who screams: "I want it and I want it now," is a good image for our fast-paced society, and the irritation that we are made to feel when we lose our patience and cannot live in the moment. We can form our hearts better than that.

The antidote is simple. Be patient. Slow down. *Gaudete – Rejoice!* We have time, we just don't use it well as we cram everything into our schedules. Instead, leave some of it open. Leave some of it empty. And I dare say, allow some time even to pray. Use the time to slow down and appreciate things and take it all in so we are not rushing to the next thing. Sit down and enjoy the decorations that have been put up. The music isn't just background noise for our other activities – listen to the words and sing them loud and proud. The cards and gifts and baking are labors of love. Enjoy them. Be present and spend quality time with the people you care about. Listen, watch, pray for God too is moving in our lives and his grace is unfolding around us. Advent is not just about passing time or rushing to Christmas; it's about learning how to appreciate what we are about to receive and the joy it brings. Appreciate the waiting itself—it makes the joy of Christmas, and every moment in between that much sweeter. *Gaudete – Rejoice!*

Third Sunday of Advent

Lectionary: 7

Reading 1

Is 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult;
the steppe will rejoice and bloom.

They will bloom with abundant flowers,
and rejoice with joyful song.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to them,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the hands that are feeble,
make firm the knees that are weak,
say to those whose hearts are frightened:
Be strong, fear not!

Here is your God,
he comes with vindication;
with divine recompense
he comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,
the ears of the deaf be cleared;
then will the lame leap like a stag,
then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return
and enter Zion singing,
crowned with everlasting joy;
they will meet with joy and gladness,
sorrow and mourning will flee.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.

R. (cf. Is 35:4) **Lord, come and save us.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD God keeps faith forever,

secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.

The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2

Jas 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters,
until the coming of the Lord.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient with it
until it receives the early and the late rains.

You too must be patient.

Make your hearts firm,
because the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another,
that you may not be judged.

Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.

Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters,
the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Alleluia

Is 61:1 (cited in Lk 4:18)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mt 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ,
he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question,

"Are you the one who is to come,
or should we look for another?"

Jesus said to them in reply,

"Go and tell John what you hear and see:

the blind regain their sight,

the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed,

the deaf hear,

the dead are raised,

and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off,

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,

"What did you go out to the desert to see?

A reed swayed by the wind?

Then what did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in fine clothing?

Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces.

Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;

he will prepare your way before you.

Amen, I say to you,

among those born of women

there has been none greater than John the Baptist;

yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."