

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (Year A) - LAND OF PEACE WEEKEND  
12-14-2025 Homily

I. Introduction

Jesus mentions in the Gospel that through His ministry, the blind regained their sight, the lame walked again, the deaf were able to hear, the dead were raised to life, and the poor had the good news proclaimed to them. Our Lord expects His people and His Church to continue proclaiming this good news and responding to the needs of those who suffer, and today this is indeed happening throughout much of the world—including in the Middle East. Last weekend the Latin Patriarch, or Catholic bishop of Jerusalem, was here in Detroit. Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa—who had been one of the leading candidates at last spring’s papal election—spoke at several Masses and fundraising dinners about the immense suffering of many people in the Holy Land, especially in the city of Gaza, which has been largely wiped out in the fighting that has occurred there for over two years now. I attended one of these Masses and fundraisers, and I heard the Cardinal personally describe how most of the buildings in Gaza have been destroyed—private homes, hospitals, schools, churches, and the city’s entire infrastructure. No one, he said, lives in the same place as before the fighting began; almost everyone is homeless, living in tents or even outdoors. Even worse, 70,000 residents of the city have been killed, and thousands more are injured, desperately needing medical care. The Christian population of Gaza has been cut in half, and social services are almost non-existent. Cardinal Pizzaballa mentioned that before the war began, the Church operated four schools in the city. They were destroyed, but now that a cease-fire is in effect, the Patriarchate hopes to re-open one school—if enough teachers can be found, for like many other people, most of them had fled for their lives to Egypt or elsewhere.

The situation is desperate—but despite that, the Cardinal offered a message of hope. The Church is serving as a sign of reconciliation, cooperating with other persons of goodwill: Christians and non-Christians alike, helping provide food, water, medical care, and other services, regardless of nationality or religion. Additionally, the United States and other nations and international aid groups have been supplying humanitarian aid—but this is usually not distributed as fairly or efficiently as the aid given by the Church and local agencies.

In such matters, a religious motivation for helping those who suffer is almost always more effective than a political one. Unlike worldly governments, the Church’s response to tragedy is rooted in hope. As the Patriarch said, “The human devastation is still there. It’s not going to finish soon, but the hope is still there. The hope, first of all, is the risen Lord; from there, we receive the strength of our hope. And then we look for the presence of the risen Lord in the society: Israelis, Palestinians, Christians, Muslims, Jews—there are a lot of people ready to give their life for the other. When people are prepared to give their lives for others, where there’s faith, there’s also the root of hope” (quoted in *Detroit Catholic*, December 4, 2025). This courageous and inspiring message is rooted in the truth of the Gospel, just as it was in the days of Jesus Himself—and our experience of Advent is also meant to be rooted in hope. Jesus Christ is the promise, foundation, and guarantee of perfect and everlasting life—and you and I are commissioned to proclaim this truth to the world.

## II. Development

The prophet Isaiah foretold a coming day of blessing, when the people of God would rejoice and no longer remember their earlier misfortune. However, as St. James tells us in the 2nd Reading, we must be patient, just as a farmer awaits the coming forth of his crop. If we plant seeds of love and mercy and justice, our efforts will not be wasted or in vain; the Lord will greatly bless His people at the appointed time, even if we don't yet see the fruit of our labors. John the Baptist himself had to be reminded of this. From prison, he wondered if Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Savior. Our Lord reassured him that, yes, He was fulfilling the prophecies about the coming Messiah—and after this, Jesus praised John for being faithful to his God-given mission, despite this world's opposition and his own questions and doubts.

## III. Conclusion

Back in October an emergency collection for the refugees in Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East was taken in Catholic parishes across the United States. Here in the Archdiocese of Detroit over half-a-million dollars was given for this purpose, and another half-million was raised during the Patriarch's recent visit. Detroit has a reputation for its toughness and grit—but it also deserves to be known for its generosity and compassion. I serve on the board of Land of Peace, the charitable organization here this weekend selling religious articles from the Holy Land, and just over a week ago I was privileged to meet Cardinal Pizzaballa and personally present to him a check from Land of Peace for \$20,000—which is just a fraction of the total contributions Land of Peace has sent to the Latin Patriarchate over the years. Your purchase of religious articles from them, of course, will help in this ongoing effort.

Pope Leo has spoken eloquently of the need to assist all victims of war and persecution, and indeed, his prayer intention for December is that “Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation, and hope.” I believe the Lord has assigned this same mission to all of us—not only through our prayers for and financial support of those who suffer in the Middle East and elsewhere, but through our own example of compassion and faith put into practice in our homes, neighborhoods, and community. This is an important part of what it means to truly observe this holy season of Advent; we must prepare ourselves to celebrate the Lord's coming by lovingly reaching out in His Name to the people around us. This is how we go before the Lord to prepare His way, and this is how we allow God's grace to prepare us for a destiny of eternal glory.

