

3rd Sunday of Advent - A
Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10;
James 5:7-10;
Matthew 11:2-11
Little Flower - 12/11/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday has traditionally been called Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means rejoice. *Gaudete* was the first word of the entrance chant in the pre-Vatican II Mass: “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near.*” Gaudete Sunday marks the mid-point of Advent, so we rejoice that our time of waiting is almost over. As a sign of rejoicing at the nearness of Christmas, the church invites us to put aside violet vestments for one day and wear rose vestments. In the ancient Roman Liturgy, today was a very festive day.

A poet once wrote that images speak to us far more powerfully than ideas. In today’s first reading, the Prophet Isaiah uses images to capture the meaning of the Israelites’ return from Exile to the promised land. Their return will be life giving. Even the desert, the parched land, and the steppe will bloom with abundant flowers. The people will come alive:

*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 dumb will sing.*

Those of us who are older can easily identify with these images. As we get older, we do not see as well, we do not hear as well, and we do not move as easily or quickly as we once did. Would we not all love to see better, hear better, and move better! The early Christian community would apply Isaiah’s prophecies to Jesus. Jesus himself captured the meaning of his coming in John’s Gospel: “*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*” [10:10].

In today’s Gospel, in answer to John the Baptist’s question, Jesus pointed to his miracles as signs of the coming of God’s kingdom, as signs that he was the long-awaited Messiah, the life giver: “*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.*” In other words, the miracles of Jesus were more than random acts of kindness. They fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, the coming of God’s kingdom.

Like Jesus, we, too, are called to be life giving. To love is to give life. As we prepare for Christmas, we need to ask ourselves if we call forth the best in others. At the very least, we need to ask what kind of example we set for our family, our friends, and others with whom we live and work. This especially applies to parents and those who work with young people. If we set good example, then we need to ask if we call forth the best in others by affirming them, affirming their gifts and talents. Finally, if we are affirming, we need to ask if our love invites and challenges them to be all they can be.

At the same time, we are called to be life giving to the larger community. Jesus reached out to those in need and gave them a fuller, richer life. As Christians, we are called to share our blessings with those around us who lack some of the blessings we have. Your Giving Tree gifts embody your generosity.

My brothers and sisters, today’s reading from the Letter of James offers us a real challenge: “*Be patient...until the coming of the Lord.*” When it comes to Christ’s coming in glory, I am almost positive that most of us are not anxiously awaiting his final coming. Likewise, I am almost positive that most of are not anxiously awaiting our own death. Our challenge is to live patiently with imperfection in ourselves, others, our relationships, and the world. Our challenge is to live patiently with the human condition. As James wrote, “*Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another that you may not be judged.*”