

CELEBRATE SABBATH

Third Sunday of Advent

Humility and simplicity enable us to live freely and joyfully in this fast moving and fast changing world.

Isaiah 35:1-10

The popular messianic expectation of the day has been fueled by descriptions of the messiah as a mighty king. Israel's Savior was described as one of David's line who would rule wisely over his people, rid Jerusalem of its oppressors, gather and judge the tribes of Israel with justice and restore the ancient boundaries of the Promised Land. God would send a righteous ruler, who is made good and powerful by God's own spirit (Isaiah 11:1-10, last Sunday's reading) and would not repeat the sins or errors in judgment of his predecessors.

This excerpt, the first reading of today, describes the joy that would come when the righteous ruler reigns. In his day the prophet says, "the desert and the parched land will exult.....strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak...the eyes of the blind will opened....mute will sing.....they will meet with joy and gladness and sorrow and mourning will flee".

The whole cosmos will reflect the joy of a redeemed people. God will do what the world thinks impossible. The season of Advent invites us to trust in the possibility of a world transformed by the coming of Christ, the just one, the prince of peace.

Be optimistic! Cultivate hope! Nurture joyful expectations of days filled with joy, gladness, peace and blessings in abundance.

Psalm 146

The Psalmist calls us to praise God, not just for an hour in song.....but with the whole of our being at all times and in all places. Because as the last verse says. "the Lord reigns forever" and His reign can be trusted. To reign is to care - verses 8-9 proclaims this confidence. **God is a God who keeps "faith" forever - He is the living God.** Therefore, God is worthy of our trust. The Psalmist calls all people to do what God does and that is the way we are to praise God. We are to learn to be like Him and do what He does.

**The Lord God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.**

The Lord sets the captives free.

James 5:7-10

The early Church lived in expectation of the immediate second coming of Jesus. James encouraged his people to wait with patience. The farmer has to wait patiently for nature to do her work so that his work becomes fruitful. Similarly, Christians must wait patiently until Christ comes for, he comes in his time. James encouraged them to live faithful lives during this waiting period without blaming each other for the difficulties they encountered.

James challenges us today to wait patiently for the revelation of the messianic age. Wait, patiently, with open arms to welcome the Lord as he breaks into your life.

Mathew 11:2-11

John the Baptist and his contemporaries had visions of the Day of the Lord, fiery judgment and forceful overthrow of political enemies. John shared these visions with graphic images of an ax being laid to the root of the tree, of a winnowing fan, a threshing floor and an unquenchable fire (last Sunday's Gospel). John was eager to "get the messianic show on the road". When Jesus came with healing in his hands and mercy and forgiveness in his message, John's messianic vision began to shake and doubts grew in his heart. So, he sent messengers to Jesus with question: "Are you the one who is to come? Should we wait for another?" Jesus gave a simple response; "Tell John what you see: the blind see, the lame walk...."

A mighty, militaristic and political Messiah must have been very appealing to the people of Judah, who had been subjected to the power struggles of empires for centuries (Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome since 63 BC). But this is NOT what Jesus accepted and proclaimed. Jesus defined His mission as one of forgiveness, healing, salvation, liberation, compassion, love - GOOD NEWS. This reflects what the Prophet Isaiah described 600 years before Christ (today's first reading, Isaiah 35:1-6).

The second half of today's Gospel reflects the character of John the Baptist. He was uncompromising. He simply spoke the truth. Jesus affirmed and praised John's integrity and spoke of him as a "prophet and much more..." God's saving plan began to unfold in John the Baptist!

John proclaimed the presence of the one they were waiting for. He called and directed those who were waiting to Jesus, the one who had already come. The one they were waiting for came, not the way they expected as a mighty warrior king, but with healing, freeing, loving and caring hands.

It is up to us now to proclaim the good news and reach out and extend healing and wholeness to one another.

Saint of the day, December 11 - St. Damasus I and 15 other saints are remembered this day.

Pope Damasus I was born in Rome around the year 305. Damasus' parents were Antonius, who became a priest at the Church of St. Lawrence (San Lorenzo) in Rome, and his wife Laurentia. Damasus began his ecclesiastical career as a deacon in his father's church, where he went on to serve as a priest. This Church later became the basilica of Saint Lawrence outside the Walls in Rome.

During Damasus' early years, Constantine I ruled the Western Roman Empire. As emperor, he issued the Edict of Milan (313), which granted religious freedom to Christians in all parts of the Roman Empire. When Pope Liberius was banished by Emperor Constantius II to Berea in 354, Damasus was archdeacon of the Roman church and followed Liberius into exile, though he immediately returned to Rome. During the period before Liberius' return, Damasus had a great share in the government of the church.

Following the death of Pope Liberius on September 24, 366, Damasus succeeded to the Papacy amidst factional violence. He faced accusations of murder and adultery with a married woman in his early years as Pope. He was active in defending the Catholic Church against the threat of schisms. In two Roman synods (368 and 369) he condemned Apollinarianism and Macedonianism, and sent legates to the First Council of Constantinople that was convoked in 381 to address these heresies.

One of the important works of Pope Damasus was to preside in the Council of Rome of 382 that determined the canon or official list of Sacred Scripture. He appointed St Jerome as his confidential secretary. Jerome spent three years (382–385) in Rome in close interaction with Pope Damasus and the leading Christians. In order to put an end to the marked divergences in the western texts of that period, Damasus encouraged Jerome to revise the available Old Latin versions of the Bible into a more accurate Latin on the basis of the Greek New Testament and the Septuagint, resulting in the Vulgate.

Damasus also did much to encourage the veneration of the Christian martyrs restoring and creating access to their tombs in the Catacombs of Rome and elsewhere, and setting up tablets with verse inscriptions composed by himself. Damasus rebuilt or repaired his father's church, Saint Lawrence, known as "St Lawrence outside the walls". His pontificate lasted eighteen years and two months.

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