

Sunday Message

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year C • 15 December 2024 • Psalter Week 3

TO POINT TOWARDS JESUS

LUKE 3:10-18



As we move closer to Christmas the excitement and anticipation is growing.

In our families and in the work place Christmas may well have already arrived with parties and nativity plays in full swing. It is hard to hold onto this precious time of preparation. This is not new. People were so excited by the way John the Baptist spoke that they almost stopped hearing what he had to say and began to think that he was the Messiah.

The first reading echoes this excitement, as Zephaniah announces the imminent arrival of the one who will bring love and joy to Israel.

The Baptist is anxious to curb the enthusiasm of those who are beginning to think he is the Messiah. He knows only too well that he is merely an instrument of God, whose job is to proclaim the arrival of the Good News. In fact, he is not even worthy to undo the sandal of the one who is coming.

Like John the Baptist, our task also is to point towards Jesus. ■

REFLECT

John the Baptist teaches us several lessons. The first is about the need to be authentic. When John began to preach, people flocked to him from everywhere, impressed by his words, his charisma, his message. Even the upper classes came to him. It must have been tempting for John to feel like a celebrity, a kind of messiah. But he resists. He is constantly at pains to push the focus away from himself. He has no desire to be the centre of attention. "Someone greater is coming after me," he says, "and I'm not fit to carry his sandals."

The people see him as a prophet, but John is no narcissist. He's not interested in fame or appearances. He remains his authentic self.

Some years ago, a young American commentator Jia Tolentino published an essay entitled 'Always be Optimising.' It's about the pressure women feel to look good, be attractive, skinny, appealing. The need to always be optimising; in other words, to never be satisfied with their appearance. It's not only women who feel this pressure. Young men feel it increasingly too.

Today's world pressurises us to be seen as successful, with a rewarding career and good income, a perfect family and a nice

house. To always be optimising. Social media, with its obsession with looks and money and celebrity, makes being your authentic self even harder. Image trumps integrity, honesty, authenticity.

And this pressure costs. It can eat into our self-esteem. We can become damaged, dispirited, disappointed. We forget that God created us in God's own image and likeness and God never creates failures. John the Baptist knew that. He always remained his authentic self. Authentic self-love is not selfish or narcissistic; it's never self-obsessed or egotistical. It's acknowledging the beauty and abilities we have in abundance, nurturing them, using them well. The Baptist urges us to be authentic.

Second, John the Baptist always pointed towards Jesus, and away from himself. Everything he said and did directed people towards Jesus. So it must be with us.

This is peak sales and marketing season. Huge sums will be spent creating memorable, heart-warming advertisements, encouraging us to spend, spend, spend. John the Baptist reminds us that Christians are advertisers also. Our lives must be everyday advertisements for the Gospel, walking billboards that point to Christ, by the kind of people we are and the witness we give. Each of us, like the Baptist, must point to Jesus every day.

DO

Reflect on the times when you elevate yourself or believe that what you have to do is more important than putting Jesus first.

SAY

"Lord, let me decrease so that you may increase in me. Amen."

LEARN

The Christian always points towards Christ.

Today is known as Gaudete Sunday, meaning 'rejoice,' from the first word of the entrance antiphon.

The Christian always speaks truth to power.

PRAY

Pray for all who work in any form of religious ministry that their lives will truly witness to Christ and bring others closer to him.

Third, John the Baptist challenges us to witness to our faith without fear. Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister says that our model must be both Jesus the healer and Jesus the prophet. The popular embrace of Jesus the healer, she says, has obscured the more radical Jesus, who challenged the status quo and religious leaders of his time.

"We live in an era that accepts half of what it means to follow Jesus," she says. "We want our religion in a spiritual Jacuzzi, a feel-good spiritual world."

She warns that we are at a time when huge choices must be made that will determine the future of the world. Choice takes three forms. The first is avoidance and to withdraw from the fray. The second is submission and passive acceptance, to not talk about religion or politics or justice and "become part of the great enabling silence." The third is to be prophetic, to refuse to accept the status quo. This prophetic choice says 'no' to anything that ignores the will of God or God's creation.

John the Baptist chose option number three - to be prophetic. He called out injustice, he challenged people to change their ways. He was martyred for it. Like the Baptist, we also must be courageous witnesses to the truth, whatever the consequences. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.
Indeed, the Lord is near.*

COLLECT

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Zephaniah 3:14-18a

A reading from the Prophet Zephaniah.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the judgements against you; he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.
The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Isaiah 12:2-3, 4b-d, 5-6 R. 6

*R: Shout aloud and sing praise,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*

- Behold, God is my salvation!
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the LORD is my strength and my praise,
and he has been my salvation.
With joy you will draw water
from the springs of salvation. **R.**
- Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name;
make known among the peoples his deeds;
proclaim that his name is exalted. **R.**
- Sing to the LORD for he has wrought wonders;
let this be known through all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing praise, you who dwell in Sion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. **R.**

SECOND READING Philippians 4:4-7

A reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Philippians.

Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything

by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL Isaiah 61:1 (Luke 4:18)

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
he has sent me to proclaim good news to the poor.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Luke 3:10-18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

At that time: The crowds asked John, 'What, then, shall we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.' Tax collectors also came to be baptised and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.' As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, 'I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork 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.' So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

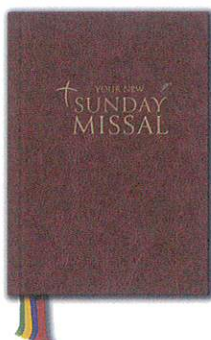
COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear.
Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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