

Commentary on the Readings for December 11, 2016

The Third Sunday in Advent

The Readings for the Third Sunday in Advent refer to the eventual triumph of God over evil of all kinds. Our role in all of this is to do our part and then to be patient and wait for the Lord God to come and act on our behalf. This, as we all know, is difficult to do. How often have you said, or thought, or heard someone else say "Where was God when we needed Him?" in this or that situation? When life seems hopeless, we yearn for God to intervene; but we must also remember that "*All things work together for those who wait and trust in the Lord.*" (**Romans 8:28**)

In the **First Reading** from the *Prophet Isaiah (35:1 — 6a, 10)*, the prophet is describing the joy that will come over the people of Israel who have been patient and didn't give up hope while waiting for deliverance from captivity in Babylon. In the same way the faithful, who are waiting for deliverance from this life on earth in order to enter heaven, "we shall enter singing, crowned with everlasting joy."

In the **Responsorial Psalm (146:6 —10)**, the psalmist extols the goodness and generosity of God who, in His own good time, provides all the necessities of mankind. However, it is often difficult for us to see this in the midst of life's struggles. Therefore, we must constantly call upon God in prayer to renew our faith and grant us the virtues of hope and patience.

In the **Second Reading** from the *Letter of St. James (5:7-10)*, we hear the apostle encourage his flock by advising them to be patient. This letter was written during a period of severe persecution when all seemed doomed; but James suggests that the people look to the prophets of old who were despised by their own people, yet never gave up hope. Or consider Job, who lost everything; yet because of his faith and hope in God, he regained everything and more.

In the **Gospel Reading** from the *Gospel of Matthew (11:2-11)*, we hear the familiar story of John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, who was in prison at this time. He must have been very discouraged knowing that his end was near. He sends friends to Jesus to learn if He, Jesus, is the "One who is to come?" This is another phrase meaning "Messiah." Jesus, rather than answering with a subjective or abstract "Yes," points out the things that He has accomplished—the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, deaf hear, etc. This must have encouraged John the Baptist because it was for just this very reason that he had worked so hard at preaching a baptism of repentance. Now he can rest in peace. But listen to the last sentence! It should cause one to sit up and take notice. Jesus says "...the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (John the Baptist). How can that be?

Advent is a time of soul-searching and preparing, of waiting and hoping; but we should not let this be the only time we think about the "coming of the Lord." Each time we approach the altar to receive the Blessed Eucharist, we are approaching Jesus Christ. A prayer beforehand to prepare our mind and heart is very much in order and then, when we do receive Him, we will be greater than John the Baptist who never had the opportunity to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Something to think about during your Prayer Time this week! **MFB**