

## **The Third Sunday of Advent – a liturgy for worship at home**

*If you have an Advent wreath or simply four candles to mark the Advent countdown to Christmas Day, you may like to light three candles and say the following:*

People of God: return! You are called to be God's own. From the mountains announce the good news. God comes in justice and peace, to all who follow his ways. You are God's children.

**Lord, make us one in the peace of Christ today and for ever. Amen.**

### **Introduction**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

How come, with all the good things the Lord gives us, that so often we are sad, so joyless? After all, we have one another, we have our faith, we have Jesus as our companion in life, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us, we have a Father in heaven who cares. We have much cause to rejoice. So today let us rejoice, for the Lord is near. Rejoice, the Lord is here. Rejoice, here with us is the Lord Jesus.

A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

Heavenly Father, you call us to prepare for the coming of your Son: forgive us our unreadiness to receive him.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you were proclaimed by John the Baptist: help us also to prepare your way.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, you speak through the prophets: make us attentive to hear your word.

Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to your truth, strengthen us to do your will and give us the joy of your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Act of Praise**

*Traditionally, the Gloria is not said or sung in Advent. However, you may like to say or sing an appropriate Advent hymn such as the following:*

*Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
the Saviour promised long;  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
And every voice a song.*

*He comes the prisoners to release  
in Satan's bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.*

*He comes the broken hearts to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to bless the humble poor.*

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,  
thy welcome shall proclaim;  
and heaven's eternal arches ring  
with thy beloved name.*

## **Collect of the Day**

God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **Today's readings**

*A reading from the prophet Isaiah*

(61:1-4 & 8-11)

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the

mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

*For the Psalm today we say the Magnificat, the Song of Mary (Luke 1: 46 – 55):*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;

He has looked with favour on his lowly servant; from this day all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

*A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians* (5: 16 – 24)

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

*Acclamation to greet the Gospel:*

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia!

*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John* (1: 6 – 8 & 19 – 28)

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.'

And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'

He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord,"' as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

*This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.*

### **Homily**

On this third Sunday of Advent we are called to rejoice. In fact, today is commonly known as 'Gaudete Sunday,' from the Latin, with its call to rejoice featuring in the various scripture readings appointed for today. In first reading the prophet declares, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has wrapped me in a robe of saving justice.' And in the second reading, St Paul tells his readers, 'Rejoice always!' What is the cause of the rejoicing to which we are called?

Certainly it has nothing to do with actual clothing or any other material gift that may serve to make us any happier, and certainly nothing that will change our daily lives so that they suddenly become easier, problem-free and painless. However, it is about a joy that may transform or transcend those experiences, enabling us to face them with a new perspective of hope and confidence.

In Advent we prepare to celebrate the great event, the good news of hope and joy coming into the world in human form. The Gospel reading describes him as

light. In the coming of Jesus Christ, the world became a brighter place, and human life a more hopeful adventure or journey.

Jesus ministered to those in need in a particular time and place. In the spirit of the prophecy we read this morning he was good news to the oppressed and the broken-hearted; he brought healing and hope to those in captivity of body, mind and spirit. His words and actions communicated the love, compassion and justice of God. Through the Spirit, the risen Christ remains present, and his saving power is available to everyone, in every time and place. He is here for us in the midst of it all, whatever our situation might be. So we can rejoice and be glad.

Yet, in our Gospel reading, as John the Baptist declared, for many, Christ stands among them unknown, unrecognised. After two thousand years, that remains true. Even though millions of people have heard of him, they do not know him. At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Albert Schweitzer concluded his ground-breaking book with these words: 'He comes to us as One unknown, without a name; as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow me!' and sets us to the tasks that he has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings that they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is.' <sup>1</sup>

This past week I have been reading about the Christian social activist Catherine Doherty. She was born into the Russian aristocracy towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and she had to flee her homeland following the Russian revolution, narrowly escaping death, and eventually she settled in Canada. She shunned the privilege and wealth into which she had been born, and she dedicated the rest of her life to the service of the poor and the marginalised, also becoming a significant voice for civil rights in the United States where she was based for some years. She saw the Russian revolution as the tragic consequence of a Christian society's failure to incarnate its faith, fail to live the gospel. All her life she cried out against the hypocrisy of those who professed to follow Christ, while failing to serve him in others, especially the poor, the needy, those whom society rejected or treated as second class or worse.

She wrote, 'Christians are called to become icons of Christ, to reflect him. But we are called to even more than that. *Ikón* is the Greek word for "image of

God.” We are called to incarnate Christ in our lives, to clothe our lives with him, so that people can see him in us, touch him in us, recognize him in us...’ To give that its most essential and obvious meaning, she added, ‘We have to begin to love one another in the fullest sense of Christ’s teaching.....When people begin to see, love, respect, and reverence Christ in the eyes of another, then they will change, and society will change also.’<sup>2</sup>

This is probably the only way, or certainly the most important way that the world will come to know Jesus Christ? Through his friends, his witnesses, his community. Christians are those who are called to be Christ-ones, those who make Christ known today, who not only speak for him but also try to live as he has taught and shown. Through us, Jesus is still to be encountered, however imperfectly, in human form. He calls us to be participants in his life and ministry, to be bearers of his good news, and to continue his loving, reconciling, healing mission in our own time and place.

We share in the Eucharist regularly so that Jesus the risen Lord may strengthen and renew us in the task of making him known in the world. May this intimate encounter with him make us always aware of his coming in all our situations and experiences and help us to be channels of his coming to others.

<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer, ‘The Quest of the Historical Jesus,’ (page 403).

<sup>2</sup> Catherine de Hueck Doherty, ‘The Gospel without Compromise,’ (pages 70 & 75)

*A few moments of silent reflection is recommended*

**The Profession of Faith**, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

*We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*

*We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.*

*We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us come now before our Father bringing him all our needs and concerns. Mighty God as we contemplate the teaching of John the Baptist on our Advent journey, give us courage to be faithful and to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” until your promises are fulfilled.

Help us to look forward in hope to the coming of our Saviour. May we live as he taught, ready to welcome Him with burning love and faith.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Merciful God, we pray for all leaders of your Church; Bishops and priests, Synods, councils and volunteers. Give them grace and deep love for those in their care that all may see and know through their example how much you love us. Bless John and those who assist him in ministry here.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Creator God, we pray for people in parts of the world where life is precarious, whether through terrorism, disaster, poverty, disease, drought, flood or war. We pray that the time may be hastened when there is peace on earth and goodwill between all people. May all peacemakers and negotiators be protected from harm and be given great wisdom as they seek justice for all.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Father God, as we approach Christmas in all its busy-ness we so often fail to hear you; hardly giving a thought to what our lives and the season of Advent are all about. Our spirits grow tired and you, Father God, can seem far away. Help us to hear your voice today and be filled once again with the love of Jesus.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life and pray for those whose lives are troubled by illness, grief, poverty or injustice. We pray that in the darkness of their suffering and pain your Advent light will shine to bring them the assurance and hope of the coming of your son Jesus. We remember at this time for Margaret Rainton, Carol Hart, Petrina Thompson and others who are known personally to us, and in a short time of silence we lift them all to you ..... We pray for all nursing and medical staff especially those working on the front line. May there soon be an end to the pandemic and responsible normality restored.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Gracious God, we hold before you those whose memory we cherish, and those whose names we will never know. We pray for your peace and comfort for the friends and families of the recently departed and those too who still miss loved ones who passed in to glory in years gone by.

**Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer**

Compassionate God, who sent John the Baptist to proclaim the Good News, help us as we go from this church to be true heralds of the coming of Christ and to proclaim the Gospel through all we do and say.

Merciful Father: **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Let us pray to God our Father for the coming of his kingdom of justice, love and peace: **Our Father.....**

*You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.*

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.  
May your body and blood be my food and drink.  
May your passion and death be my strength and life.  
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.  
May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.  
Let me not run from the love which you offer  
but hold me safe from the forces of evil.  
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.  
Keep calling to me until that day comes  
when, with your saints, I may praise you for ever. Amen.

### **Concluding Prayer**

God our Father, we thank you that through this act of worship you have given us a glimpse of the One we do not know as well as we should, your Son Jesus Christ. May he stay with us now in everyday life and help us to know him better and to recognize him in the people around us, especially in the poor and the humble, and by doing for one another what he did and still does for us. We ask this in his name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Final reflection and Blessing**

We read today the words of the prophet, ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor.’ At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus used the same words about himself. We now share in his mission. We have to make him visible, incarnate, in the Church and in the world of today through ourselves, by our concern for others, especially those most in need.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you, and with those you love and pray for, today and always. Amen.

Let us go in peace and joy to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Christ. Amen.