

Rejoice in the Lord!

*A Missionary Commentary on the
Sunday Readings*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10

Psalms 146: 6-10

James 5: 7-10

Matthew 11: 2-11

[USCCB link to the Sunday Readings](#)

The entrance antiphon for the third week of Advent gives a seemingly counter-cultural message. In a world embroiled in heartbreaking turmoil, we are told: “Rejoice . . . the Lord is near.” (Philippians 4:4-5) What can this call to “joy” possibly mean? Joy is different from happiness which often depends on exterior circumstances to “make us happy.” Joy goes much deeper.

It has been said that joy is an inner assurance that God is in control of all that happens and that assurance enables one to be at peace with the circumstances that surrounds our life. But, at this time of turmoil in our country and in the world, is this really the state of mind that most of us live in? What about worry and fear and all sorts of emotions that can take away the peace of our hearts – war and conflict, inflation, gun violence and drug wars, needs of the young and elderly and all those “sandwiched” in between. Can one live “joy” in the midst of so many concerns and worries? Perhaps a “reboot” on the meaning of “joy” is sorely needed.

Today’s readings from our ancestors in the faith give us this “reboot!” Isaiah gives a summons to courage in the midst of tumult and his words are bold: strengthen!, make firm!, be strong!, fear not!. These commands beg the question: how can we do that? And the answer comes: because God is coming to save you. In other words, God is waiting for your “awakening” to God’s all-embracing care and that awakening is the source of a joy rooted in a deep, patient confidence that God is in the midst of our experiences even those of deep darkness.

From the darkness of his prison cell, John the Baptist was in need of this “awakening” and sent his disciples to ask if Jesus is the one to “awaken” the people to God’s presence in their midst. Jesus gives answer: “awakening” looks like the blind regaining their sight (seeing clearly the ways of God), the lame walking (walking the paths of justice and righteousness), the cleansing of whatever keeps us from seeing ourselves as “image of God.” It looks like the deaf hearing the words “you are loved.”

All these “awakenings” bear witness to the reality that whatever has died within us can be raised and come to life. These signs of herald the “Reign of God” made visible in our

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midst as God comes to save us. On this third Sunday in Advent, we rejoice in the joy that God is stronger than any heartbreaking turmoil.

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Isaiah gives full voice to the transformation of all things in the Day of the Lord when “sorrow and mourning” will cease. His words to be strong and trust in God give encouragement and hope to all those weighed down by hardships and worries.

Psalm

A psalm of faithful trust in God’s care for all.

Second Reading

St. James stresses the importance of patience which can be difficult to sustain in times of fear and worry.

Gospel

John, in prison, needs an “awakening” to God’s actions in the midst of the people. He sends his disciples to check on what Jesus is doing and receives news of the signs of the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom.

Notes and Commentary by Sr. Nonie Gutzler, MM who has served as a theologian, missionary in Tanzania and Taiwan, and in leadership for her community.

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