

For Sunday, December 13, 2015

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

3rd Sunday of Advent

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/121315.cfm>

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

This weekend the church celebrates Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday. Our Advent themes of expectation and hope are quickly turning into the anticipated joy that meeting Christ will bring. Merriam-Webster defines joy as “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires.” The Lord is near! Our first reading from the Prophet Zephaniah sets the stage so well! “Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!” “The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear.” “The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior.”



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We are called on this Gaudete Sunday to focus on what is soon to come, what will complete us and mend the wounds of our hearts. What we experience now is imperfect and incomplete. Inwardly, we know that there must be more, that there is a greater happiness to be achieved. The gift has come in Jesus Christ when he was born in time. And with his birth the words of the Prophet Isaiah found in today's psalm find fulfillment: “Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” In Christ, God visits his people, shows us the way, and provides the path to joy.

On one occasion when addressing his disciples Jesus proclaimed, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see” ([Lk 10:23](#)). This really summarizes our whole Advent journey. It is the task before us to ask God to help us, through this special time we have been given, to develop the “third eye” of contemplation so that we can see the truth. As we look upon the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, we do not witness an ordinary birth in time or the birth of another prophet. We witness and welcome, again, the Holy One of Israel and cry out with joy and gladness that he is among us! The incarnation of Christ is what shows us the divine in the secular, the holy in the mundane, the extraordinary in the common, the light in the darkness, the hope in the despair, and the joy in the sadness.

Recently, Pope Francis made [a historic visit](#) to the Central African Republic, which is the first time a pope has ever visited an active conflict zone. He exhorted those who listened to find their way to peace. As a leader and as a witness, Pope Francis exudes joy! You can see it and experience it in the fiber of his being.

He is a living example that St. Paul's words to the Philippians are possible to achieve: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God."

Pope Francis realizes and understands that true power is not earthly power. We have a King who has already come and who promises to come again who has a different vision of things than we sometimes do. This King brings good news. John the Baptist in today's Gospel maps out this vision perfectly. "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." He told the tax collectors to "stop collecting more than what is prescribed." And to the soldiers he said, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." God's kingdom becomes realized when we are able to see the truth about Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and see that true power is found in finding our way to peace with one another. When we realize our proper goal, joy will come to our hearts!

All of our readings this weekend clearly draw us away from fear and to joy. So many things cause us to be anxious and fearful. Faith is a powerful thing. It casts out fear, dispels darkness, relieves anxiety, gives us focus, clarity, and direction, grounds, secures and assures us, and points us in the way we need to go. Our lives are complicated and ever changing. With our world struggling the way it is, what is one way today can be much different tomorrow? What we have come to depend upon today can be taken away tomorrow. Change is inevitable and change is not always positive. Given all of this the question directed toward us today is this: do we really believe that the King of Israel, the Lord, is in our midst?

Pope Francis does and he exudes great joy! He does not succumb to fear. The message of Advent is real and tangible. We affirm our faith in the God who came among us as Jesus in history. We affirm our faith in Jesus who was raised from the dead and is Christ with us. We look to Jesus the Christ to come again in glory. God is ever present through all times and ages calling us to trust and have no fear. If we can embrace this truth this Advent season and realize that we are called to live in solidarity with our sisters and brothers then "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Peace. Pope Francis called the [Central African Republic to be at peace](#). Christ our savior calls us to be at peace. Rejoice, for we possess what we desire, God our savior!

Rev. Mark S. Suslenko

PRAYER

Your light will come, O Jerusalem.
The Lord will dawn on you in radiant beauty.
We shall see the glory of the Lord,
the splendor of our God.
The sign of the cross shall appear in the heavens,
when our Lord shall come to judge the world.

—*Excerpted from A Prayer Book of Catholic Devotions.*

NOTICES

RELIGIOUS FUND FOR RETIREMENT COLLECTION

The Retirement Fund for Religious provides support for thousands of elderly Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests. The national collection will be held in most US Catholic parishes the weekend of December 12–13, 2015. To learn more about the collection and download materials for the campaign, visit www.RetiredReligious.org/resources/.

ADVENT RESOURCES FROM THE USCCB

The USCCB will once again have an online daily calendar for the Advent–Christmas season. You will want to share this information with parish members, school and religious education staffs, and other interested parties. The online calendar can be found at: www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent/index.cfm. A PDF version of the calendar is also available: www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent/upload/advent-calendar.pdf.

HOLY YEAR OF MERCY RESOURCES

The Holy Year of Mercy began on December 8, 2015 and runs through November 20, 2016. For resources to help celebrate this Extraordinary Jubilee, visit the USCCB's resource page at www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/index.cfm. Additional artwork is available to LPi customers on the Art & Media Portal [here](#).

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