



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 11, 2016

Introduction to the Word:



Advent is here and regardless of which church cycle we are in, the underlying theme is “*Prepare*.” Two ways: we *prepare* as this Advent season unfolds and we rely on **HOPE**. Hope is not this “looking at the world through rose-colored glasses” thing. Hope is tough stuff. It is not what our human nature typically defaults to when things are going wrong and the world seems to be crumbling around us. Hope requires an inner strength, a reliance on God, knowing His love for us will always get us through. This is why Hope is not a thing but a person.

During our first week of Advent we entered into “Call and Response” seek to look for the moments to Praise the Lord, pause and Hmm and even respond to His amazing grace with “Amen”.

During our second week of Advent we tackled the question – do we want to resemble Jesus? If we answered: “Yes” then we would accept the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, embrace the Spirit of counsel and might and desire the spirit of knowledge and the Reverence of the Lord as we call out “Come Lord Jesus.”

Now our Third Sunday calls us to Hope (the person of Jesus) as our constant beacon even in the moments when the Jolly Season we approach is not so Jolly. Even as we discover, John the Baptist is not “rejoicing”, but he wants assurances of who the Messiah is – and often so do we.

Warm-Up:

On this *Rejoicing* (in Latin, “Gaudete”) *Sunday*, a good starting point may be this: To what extent do you think you have been influenced by the negativity, cynicism, and corrupt values of our society? Share your thoughts.

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

Leader: We wait in joyful hope for the *coming again* of Jesus Christ. He has promised to return in all His glory in order to lead us to share in the fullness of His own life so that we, in turn, may bring this life and light to our communities and our world.

Lord Jesus, you came to reveal to us the fullness of God's love, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, our Emmanuel, God-with-us, God-for-us, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, our most certain way to the Father/Mother, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10)

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, and do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (James 5:7–10)

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 11:2–11)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

When John the Baptist heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples who said to Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receives their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.” As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

[You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord’s Day Message](#)

Halfway through our Advent pilgrimage we pause for a moment to celebrate *Gaudete Sunday*, a Sunday for *rejoicing*. The readings are generally encouraging and hope-filled, and they provide us with a glimpse of our final destination and our cause for joy. However, there is a paradox here. On the one hand, there is a scene of blossoming life and beautiful restoration; on the other, there is a picture of John the Baptist languishing in prison. It seems that the reality toward which we are traveling is not devoid of hardships, and the journey itself can at times seem joyless.

Joy is something that all of us long for and search for. Deep down, every one of us wants to be a joy-filled person. “God made us for joy,” said Pope John Paul II. That’s why it’s important, I think, that we give careful consideration to what today’s Scripture readings suggest that we do. Isaiah doesn’t tell us simply to rejoice. The prophet tells us instead to rejoice “*in the Lord*.” That’s a critical distinction, because so many people today try to find joy in something other than the Lord. As Pope Francis said in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel): “*The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.*”

While there are many things in our world that can bring us some happiness (gift card comfort, pop psychology, self-help books), true and lasting joy can only come about through a personal, life-giving relationship with the Lord. As Isaiah said, “In my God is the joy of my soul,” and Pope Francis speaks of “the quiet joy of [God’s] love”. This means two things. First, joy is God’s



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

gift to us when we're in relationship with him. Second, if we want to be joyful people, we need to work on our relationship with God. Joy, then, is something we need to cultivate.

In Matthew's Gospel passage, John the Baptist is in prison because of his confrontations with Herod Antipas, tetrarch (a petty ruler) of Galilee and Perea (area east of the Jordan River), over the king's unlawful marriage. But confused and perhaps even disturbed by Jesus' behaviour, John sent his own disciples to question Jesus on these issues and get some clarification. Was Jesus really the triumphant Messiah that everybody had been expecting?

Matthew implies that John the Baptist appears to have had some serious doubts. John's followers had varied opinions of the coming Messiah, such as an exceptional prophet like Moses or a great leader like King David. Then others yearned for a warrior king, one who would defeat all of Israel's enemies and restore a permanent peace in all Judea. Now along comes Jesus, a story teller, eating with sinners, and performing healing miracles. So when John's question is put to Jesus, "*Are you the one who is to come?*" Jesus instructs them to go back to John and tell him what they themselves have seen and heard: "*The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me*" (i.e., who does not find me to be a stumbling-block). This latter statement of Matthew can be viewed as a summary of Jesus' understanding of himself, namely that *He (Jesus) is the one* who confers citizenship in *the Reign of God*. This citizenship is focused always on *service to the humblest and most disadvantaged people* – the hallmark of "God's Reign."

So what's the bottom line of this week if we are committed to celebrate differently? Well, it's that disappointments happen this side of heaven. But if our focus is on the Lord, though they will not go away, they will be kept in perspective as we seek of serve Him. This requires us to look for Jesus daily – to call out to Him "are you the one?" To put our doubts before Him but also our confidence tangibly in Him. Daily prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, quiet time speaking heart to heart with God, embracing His Word, devotional prayer (eg Rosary), and looking to surround ourselves with life giving friendships rooted in faith – all of these aide us in knowing He is the one – the Messiah – the Lord!

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

Do you have some empathy for John the Baptist? He appeared to do everything right. Even the public historian Josephus describes John the Baptist as a very gifted and popular preacher, while he has very little to say about Jesus. John's expectations of the Messiah were not in synchrony with what he saw in Jesus. So he was very confused.



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

Have you ever had a situation or an experience, similar to that of John the Baptist where you did everything that you *thought* was right but nothing seemed to turn out the way you wanted? Explain. What were the circumstances?

What are some ways to tangibly that you can be a source of helping other look for Jesus - here are some hints – but come up with more:

- ◆ Pray for someone with whom you grumble.
- ◆ Forgive someone who does not expect it.
- ◆ Send money to someone who needs it.
- ◆ Include someone who is usually left out.

Intercessions:

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

For the Church, gathered in prayer during the holy season of Advent: may gratefulness and kindness be the guide posts of our journey of faith. We pray to the Lord.

For areas of the world in strife and seeking peace - recalling our mission work in Haiti, Kenya, Jerusalem: that one nation will not raise the sword against another, and that we in our actions and deeds, may be instruments of peace in our homes and in our heart. We pray to the Lord.

For each of us: that we may Celebrate Differently as a people of faith and be vigilant in waiting upon Christ who comes to bring us light, health and strength. We pray to the Lord.

In Thanksgiving for the Lord's continued blessing upon our parish community. As a Family of Faith, may we remain a place with something for everyone, with the Eucharist as the centre of our parish life. We pray to the Lord.

For our parish family: as we undertake a focus on kindness, may our hearts change in deed and action as we seek to help others through our Red Stocking appeal and Kindness Counts Campaign. We pray to the Lord.

For all who have died and await the kingdom, and for the intentions recorded in the Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: **Hail Mary**

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually – for the intentions of the parish common good and for the objectives of our pastoral priorities. Remember also our Pastor, our Pastoral Team.

GROUP ACTION:

- Our Day of Mercy (all day confessions) is on **December 15th from 8:00am-8:00pm.** Twelve Hours, Twelve Confessors. Consider setting aside time to join us for this evening.

Let us pray (together)

God of Love,

Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.

He is a sign of your love. Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,

As we wait and prepare for his coming.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Heart to Home, copyright © 2016 by Father F. Freitas. It is **copyrighted and cannot be published without permission of the author**. The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version