

FIRST READING – A ADVENT 3

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

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, 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.

Crocus



Crocus = Crow-cuss

Sharon = SHEHR-uhn

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A ADVENT 3

A reading from the letter of Saint James.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

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.
Brothers and sisters, 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, brothers and sisters,
take the Prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A ADVENT 3

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

When John 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 receive 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.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10

Although this chapter comes from the earlier part of Isaiah (chapters 1-39), its theme and mood are far more reminiscent of the unknown prophet of the Exile whom we call Second (Deutero-) Isaiah.

Like Second Isaiah, the writer of this chapter speaks of the return from Babylonian exile in terms of the exodus: in the return to Jerusalem the miracles of the first exodus will be repeated (see Is 40), the wilderness will rejoice and blossom as it did in the exodus, and the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion.

There will also be accompanying miracles: the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the lame will walk, and the tongues of the speechless will sing.

This passage is very important for the New Testament. Jesus' healing miracles, for instance, are recounted in language derived from this passage. Thus, the story of the deaf-mute in Mk 7 actually uses the unusual word *mogilalos* (with "an impediment in his speech") which the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) uses in this passage.

Again, in the answer to John in prison (see Gospel Reading), there are further echoes of this passage.

The New Testament took up such prophecies as Isaiah 35 and found their fulfillment in the Christ event.

It is in the coming of Christ that the wilderness blossoms as the crocus; it is in him that the glory of the Lord is revealed (cf. Is 35:2 and 40:5 with John 1:14); it is in Christ that God comes to save his people; and it is in Christ that the exiles return to Zion with great joy.

There is nothing unusual in this shift of application. It is a procedure that took place constantly throughout the Old Testament and Judaism, and it is simply continued in the New Testament.

Each successive event in salvation history discloses a new meaning in previous prophecies. In this way the word of the Lord, once uttered, continues to be an effective force in salvation history.

Responsorial Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

This is the first of the final group of Hallel (Hallelujah) psalms in the psalter. It is a psalm of praise for YHWH's mighty acts of salvation, and it takes up some of the themes we have already found in today's Old Testament reading.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. "The way of the wicked he brings to ruin" in the psalm recalls the verse "your God will come with vengeance" in the reading.

Once again, Christian faith can see the fulfillment of all these blessings in the coming of Christ. It is he who executes justice for the oppressed, who feeds the hungry (Mk 6:37-44 and parallels), who upholds the widow (Mk 12:41-44). And above all, it is in him that the reign of God is established to all generations.

Reading II: James 5:7-10

Among the readings appointed for this Sunday, this is the only one that does not take up the theme of the healing miracles that accompany the advent of the Messiah. And when it speaks of the “coming” of the Lord, it means, not his first advent, but the Last Judgment: “the Judge is standing at the doors!”

This is not an oversight on the part of those who drew up the Lectionary. Here we have a lingering echo of the futurist eschatology that was dominant on the last Sundays of the old church year and continued through the first Sunday of Advent.

Even when we concentrate on the first coming, we must not lose sight of the second. Even as we rejoice with exuberant joy at the first coming, we must also listen to the warning of the impending judgment and to the challenge to be patient.

The use of the farmer as an example of patience seems to be suggested by our Lord’s parable of the seed growing secretly in Mk 4:26-29, where it was applied to the coming of the kingdom.

A second illustration of patience, and of suffering as well, is taken from the Old Testament prophets. This, too, is especially apt for the Advent season.

The Old Testament prophets believed that the word they uttered would be fulfilled very shortly, but they had to learn that God fulfills this word in God’s own good time, even the word that God had promised through the prophet to fulfill very soon.

Does God therefore deceive the prophets? Not if Jesus is right in maintaining that God can rescind God’s holy will as a free act of mercy (see Mt 24:37-44). When that happens, the lesson of patience is especially pertinent.

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

The casual reader of the Gospels is often puzzled by this story. How is it that John came to wonder whether Jesus was the Coming One? After all, had not John already greeted Jesus as the Coming One (Mt 3:14)? Was he perhaps having second thoughts now?

Had Jesus turned out to be a different kind of Messiah from the one John had expected—one meek and lowly of heart rather than one who purged the threshing floor with the winnowing fan of judgment?

These are interesting questions, but they are irrelevant to a proper understanding of our text. The real question is the one addressed to us: Can we believe that he is the Coming One or must we look for another?

In answer to John's question—which is our question, too—Jesus does not give a straight yes or no but points to what is happening in his ministry: the blind see, the lame walk, etc.

Note the oblique way in which Jesus speaks of his mighty works. He does not say that he is healing the blind. The blind are given their sight by God!

Thus Jesus indirectly affirms that his miracles are works of God wrought through him. But he never says so directly. The hearer has to work this out for himself or herself and to make a decision of faith.

Traditional apologetics used to cite the miracles of Jesus as “proofs” of his “divinity.” This is not the way the Bible uses them. They are not proofs but signs—signs for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

And they are not signs of Jesus' divinity (a Greek rather than a biblical term) but signs that God is present and at work in Jesus.

Note that Jesus' answer echoes the language of Isaiah 35 and other prophecies (Is 29 and Is 61). So the reader is confronted with a decision: Either these works are signs of the eschatological presence of God in Jesus or they are ultimately trivial episodes with no claim to our faith.

But: “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense [i.e., does not stumble] at me,” that is to say, the person who sees that God is eschatologically active in Jesus' word and work is already a partaker in the blessings of the messianic age.

The second part of the Gospel reading deals with the place of John the Baptist in salvation history. He is the messenger who prepares the way of the Messiah; he is the expected Elijah returned to herald the end.

Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, for John stands at the threshold of the new age. He is the last of the prophets and, like them, still points forward to the kingdom of heaven and the coming of the Messiah.

He still stands on the Old Testament side of the great divide between the two ages. He is the “sentinel at the frontier between the aeons” (Bornkamm).

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