



# **Sunday Mass Preparation Guide**

**Including**

## **The Readings**

**First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Second Reading  
Gospel**

## **Study Guide**

**Study Guide including Background on Readings  
And Thought Questions**

## **In-Depth Reflection**

**A Thought-Provoking Written Analysis on  
One of the Readings**

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## UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB » Bible » Daily Readings

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### DECEMBER 17, 2017

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**Third Sunday of Advent**  
**Lectionary: 8**

#### Reading 1

IS 61:1-2A, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,  
to heal the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and release to the prisoners,  
to announce a year of favor from the LORD  
and a day of vindication by our God.

I rejoice heartily in the LORD,  
in my God is the joy of my soul;  
for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation  
and wrapped me in a mantle of justice,  
like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem,  
like a bride bedecked with her jewels.  
As the earth brings forth its plants,  
and a garden makes its growth spring up,  
so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise  
spring up before all the nations.

#### Responsorial Psalm

LK 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

R. (Is 61:10b) My soul rejoices in my God.  
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked upon his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
R. My soul rejoices in my God.  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him

in every generation.

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

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

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

## Reading 2

1 THES 5:16-24

Brothers and sisters:  
Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.  
In all circumstances give thanks,  
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.  
Do not quench the Spirit.  
Do not despise prophetic utterances.  
Test everything; retain what is good.  
Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy  
and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body,  
be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
The one who calls you is faithful,  
and he will also accomplish it.

## Alleluia

IS 61:1 (CITED IN LK 4:18)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

## Gospel

JN 1:6-8, 19-28

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John.  
When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests  
and Levites to him  
to ask him, "Who are you?"  
He admitted and did not deny it,  
but admitted, "I am not the Christ."

So they asked him,  
"What are you then? Are you Elijah?"  
And he said, "I am not."  
"Are you the Prophet?"  
He answered, "No."  
So they said to him,  
"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?  
What do you have to say for yourself?"  
He said:  
"I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert,  
'make straight the way of the Lord,'*"  
as Isaiah the prophet said."  
Some Pharisees were also sent.  
They asked him,  
"Why then do you baptize  
if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"  
John answered them,  
"I baptize with water;  
but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,  
the one who is coming after me,  
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."  
This happened in Bethany across the Jordan,  
where John was baptizing.

#### Get the daily readings sent to your email every morning

Email Address:\*  \*indicates required

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## THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 11, 2016 A

**Opening prayer:** *God of our Lord Jesus Christ, creation rejoices in the hope of the Savior's coming and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time. Prepare our hearts for our Lord's coming and remove all the things that hinder us from feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow. Be with us now, Lord, as we gather to share our lives and your holy Word. Amen.*

**Sharing life:** How did you experience God's presence and action this week?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** In the first reading, Isaiah offers hope to the weak and frightened Israelites living in exile. In the second reading, James also offers hope to people awaiting the Second Coming of the Lord. In the Gospel, the imprisoned John the Baptist is confused about the identity of Jesus.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

The people of Israel are in exile because of their infidelity to their covenant with God. But God's prophet announces the good news that their time of exile is about to end. God is coming to *liberate* his broken-hearted people.

Just as Moses led their ancestors through the desert to the Promised Land, God will lead his people through the desert and back to the Promised Land. But this journey through the desert will not be rigorous and difficult like their first journey. Their way will be eased by the gracious hand of God. Nature will be transformed. Oases will spring up to refresh them and where once brambles and thorns had made travel difficult, now flowers and beautiful foliage will decorate their path. During their journey, the frightened will become bold, the feeble will gain strength, and the blind, the lame, and the deaf will experience liberation.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 146

This psalm expresses God's concern for the disenfranchised and poor.

### SECOND READING: James 5:7-10

James counsels the Christian community to practice patience. (People are becoming impatient because Jesus' return or Second Coming is being delayed and because of conflicts in the community.) James uses the image of a farmer to make his point. Just as a farmer is subject to the elements of nature and the weather and must cooperate with them, so must the Christian practice patience with God's timing and ways. James also urges his readers to take as models

the prophets who suffered much as they spoke the Word of God.

### GOSPEL: Matthew 11:2-11

Last week, we encountered John out in the desert; today, we meet him in prison (which must have been an awful experience for a man who loved the wilderness). He is in jail because he has told Herod that it is wrong for him to marry his brother's wife.

The Gospel has two parts: the first speaks about John's faith-crisis, and the second about his role in the plan of salvation, as established by Jesus.

It would seem that John's followers have been reporting to him about the ministry of Jesus—his healings and his befriending of sinners. John is confused because Jesus is not turning out to be the type of messiah that he is announcing. John, it seems, is looking for one who possesses a more forceful and authoritative expression of power. Where are the axe, winnowing fan and fire spoken about last Sunday? John wonders if Jesus is the One who is to come—or should he look for another? Jesus' response is indirect. Contrary to popular expectations, Jesus will neither be the militaristic leader who would drive out the Romans nor the 'hell-fire and damnation' messiah. Rather, Jesus is to fulfill the vision of the Messiah described by Isaiah in today's first reading—he will bring healing to the sick and mercy to sinners.

*"In Matthew's story, John represents those of us who find ourselves at a point in life when it becomes clear that the vision to which we gave our lives is not emerging."* (George Smigma)

Jesus says: “*Blest are the ones who take no offense at me*” (not scandalized). These words are intended to challenge John and his followers to correct their perception of the Messiah and to accept God’s way of saving the world.

Having clarified his own role and mission, Jesus goes on to define John’s calling in history: he is not a reed swaying in the wind like his unprincipled jailer, Herod. John’s role is greater than any of the eminent prophets: John, who came before him, is to announce the coming of the Messiah and to prepare the people for that glorious event. Yet, as Jesus says, the *least* in the new kingdom that he is inaugurating are *greater* than John because they will experience the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which will occur after John’s death.

### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you most? Why?
2. The first reading speaks about “frightened hearts.” At times, all of us feel scared and fragile. What can cause you to be fearful? What helps you deal with your fears?
3. James speaks about “patient waiting.” Can you recall a time when you had to patiently wait for God or something else? How did you cope with that? Are you a patient person?
4. John was confused about Jesus’ identity because of his miracles and works of mercy. Is there anything about God’s ways that confuses you?

### RESPONDING TO THE WORD

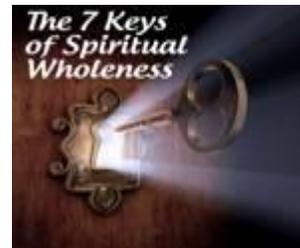
Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Suggestions: Be open to the unexpected ways of God. Consider attending your parish’s Advent Penance Service.

### CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace to recognize the surprising ways of God. Pray that Catholics who have not received the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a long time will be moved to do so this Advent season. ©

### Begin the New Year Energized!

Julianne Stanz Presents



Joy; Gratitude; Simplicity; Mercy; Prayer;  
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### A Day of Reflection

January 7, 2017, 8 am – 3 pm

Holy Name of Jesus Parish Indialantic, FL

**Tickets:** \$12 include breakfast & lunch

Contact: [sccspacecoast@gmail.com](mailto:sccspacecoast@gmail.com)

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# ROSE-COLORED CANDLE- SYMBOL OF JOY

## Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent, Cycle A

The third Sunday in Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*. "*Gaudete*" is the Latin word for "let us rejoice". The liturgical mood is one of *joyful anticipation* that the feast of Christmas coming is getting closer. Today, the rose colored candle, the symbol of joy, is lit today. *Marantha*, a word used in our recessional song, means "Come, Lord Jesus".

### A Crisis of Faith for John the Baptist

In last Sunday's gospel we encountered John the Baptist out in the desert preaching a strong word of repentance. Today, we find him in prison because he had condemned Herod for "stealing" his brother's wife.

My first thought about this story is, how hard it must have been for John who loved the open spaces of the desert to be locked up in jail. My second thought is that John the Baptist could act as the patron saint of all those who are in prison wrongfully.

Of course, the bigger story in this gospel is the crisis of faith that the great preacher of repentance is seemingly undergoing concerning the identity of Jesus. John had images of the Messiah as one who would judge and punish evildoers and destroy God's enemies, a Messiah who would be a mighty conqueror of the Romans. But in prison he hears about a very different kind of Messiah, one who is acting with great compassion, one who is befriending sinners and healing the sick. John is so confused that he asks his disciples to go and ask Jesus the question: "*Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*" Can you imagine, this great man of God doubting if Jesus is really the Messiah?

Jesus' response to John is not a direct 'yes' or 'no'. Rather, he says: "Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk----Jesus' response is a direct quote from Isaiah in which the great prophet describes what the Messiah will be about. In using Isaiah's words, Jesus is saying to John "if you knew your scriptures, you would not be surprised at how I am acting." Jesus' response to John ends with the words: "*And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me*" Here, Jesus is saying to John and his followers who expected a much more forceful Messiah, blessed are you who will be not offended or shaken up because I am not the kind of Messiah that you expected me to be.

In this event John is faced with a big decision: he could stubbornly hold onto the image he had of the Messiah or adjust his image and thinking to what Jesus was presenting. After years of investment in a particular image of what the Messiah would be like, it would not be easy for him to let go and embrace a whole new image, to replace his image of a tough, authoritative, judgmental type of a Messiah with a softer, gentler image. It seems that John made the adjustment. In John's gospel, John says to his disciples: "*He (Jesus) must increase, I must decrease*".

### *Application to Our Lives*

This story has application to our lives on several levels. I'll mention a few and you will, no doubt, have your own levels of application.

#### *God-Level*

We may have been raised with a particular image of God or we may have particular expectations of God. For example; "if I say my prayers, go to church, follow the commandments, God will take care of me". Then something like Sept 11th happens to me or to a family member. Results, my long-held image of God watching out for me, a good Catholic is blown to pieces. Now, I, like John have a decision to make: I can become bitter at God for failing to uphold his side of the bargain or I can adjust my image of God which now includes a God who allows bad things to happen to good, faithful people.

#### *Church-Level*

Pre-Vatican II Catholics were raised with an image of church that was stable and unchanging. Everything around them could change but not the church; it was the one bastion of stability. Then came the 78 year old John XXIII who in his old age decides that it was time to open up the windows of the church and let in some fresh air. To many Catholics it seems that a hurricane blew in and now the church that was the symbol of stability in a fast changing world was suddenly changing in all kinds of ways. Once again, Catholics were faced with a decision: to stubbornly stick with long held images of church or to adjust to some new images that the Holy Spirit was presenting.

### *Doctrine-Level*

Most, if not all of us, who were raised Catholic grew up believing in the existence of God, in the divinity of Jesus, in his Real Presence in the Blessed Eucharist, in the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, in the existence of an afterlife, in Papal infallibility. Then somewhere along the way we may have started to doubt one or more of the above doctrines. This can be unnerving to move from a stable set of beliefs to ones that I now have all kinds of questions about.

Here my decision may be to stay in my doubt or to start exploring my beliefs with the hope of coming to an adult understanding of them. Many Catholics try to go through life with a grade school understanding of their faith. For some this works, but for others it does not. Of course, this maturing process involves not just some extra reading and religious adult classes but also, prayer in which we ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth.

### *Moral-Level*

As Catholics, especially those of us raised in the pre Vatican II age, we were taught sex outside of marriage was a mortal sin, as was masturbation. Divorce was wrong, abortion was wrong and artificial birth control was wrong. Homosexuals were seen as perverts. (Of course, the moral life includes a lot more than sexual issues, but for most Catholics these are the conflict issues that lead to a crisis of conscience). The so called sexual revolution that took place in the 60's changed the way a lot of Catholics viewed these issues. The church was seen by many Catholics as outdated. As a result many Catholics started not only to engage in premarital sex, but also, started to cohabit prior to marriage. It is said that about 80% of Catholics practice some form of artificial birth control and many think abortion is okay especially in some situations. Many Catholics today accept a gay lifestyle as normal.

For many good Catholics this whole moral crisis started when Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*, in which he condemned all methods of artificial birth control. Many Catholics, including theologians and high-ranking bishops, favored a change coming in this area of the church's moral teaching. When it didn't come, a moral crisis occurred overnight. Many Catholics who could not in good conscience follow *Humanae Vitae* felt banned from holy communion and stopped going to church. Other Catholics with the help of caring pastors weathered the storm better. They learned a lot about the primacy of an informed conscience in matters of morality.

When we experience a crisis of conscience with regard to church doctrine and moral teaching, the immature response is rebellion, the attitude that says: "I don't care what the church teaches; I'll do what I like". The more mature attitude uses the crisis as a stepping stone or opportunity for growth. We decide to read, explore, dialog, and pray and then come to a mature decision about a particular doctrine or belief.

### *Relationship Crisis/Midlife Crisis*

As most, if not all of you who are married, know every relationship or almost every relationship can also experience a crisis. Along the journey of marriage, one or both spouses may wonder if they want to be married anymore. Their expectations of marriage are not being fulfilled. Coupled with this relationship crisis may be the famous *mid life crisis*, in which a man or woman feels a need to go 'find him/herself'. They may wonder or doubt their religious and moral beliefs, they no longer experience fulfillment in work or in marriage. They no longer seem to know who they are or what life is all about.

The Chinese word for crisis has a double translation: *danger* and *opportunity*. Every crisis experience can be a *danger* or *opportunity*. The *danger* is that we go a bit crazy and throw out solid beliefs and practices or to we may prematurely opt out of relationships. The *opportunity* is that a crisis can lead to tremendous new growth in several areas of our

lives. The couple who experiences a marital crisis can throw away a marriage with lots of potential or they can go to counseling, begin to pray for their marriage etc. and most likely, come to a whole new experience of each other. The choice is always ours.

### Reflection Questions

- 1) Have you ever had one of the above mentioned crises, if so what resources helped you to cope with the crisis?
- 2) Over the years have you had to adjust your image of God? If so, how?