



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent (A)
December 15, 2019

Be Strong and Fear Not

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

John came to announce a savior, but in his difficult imprisonment, he and his disciples began to wonder if the one he announced was truly the one. Even after months spent in the desert preparing himself as well as preaching conversion, John's heart is tempted to doubt. Yes, even saints struggle. It is easy to doubt when difficulty comes our way and life doesn't treat us as we think we deserve.

John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. It does us much good to bring our concerns and doubts to Jesus directly! Jesus responds as he often does. Rather than just answer, "I am

he"—which could easily be considered an empty claim—he invites them to look at the evidence. He fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5: "The eyes of the blind shall see, / and the ears of the deaf be opened," the poor shall find a new reason to hope.

Jesus' mission is to change lives and to save us from the blindness of egoism, the deafness of a hardened heart, and the closed mind that cannot accept the other. He is the savior of those who let themselves be saved.

Saint James' exhortation could have been meant for John the Baptist or anyone who finds it hard to persevere in trusting and following Jesus: "You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Be strong, do not fear! / Here is your God, / he comes with vindication; / With divine recompense / he comes to save you.

James 5:7–10

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

Matthew 11:2–11

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

A Word from Pope Francis

Your music and your song are a true instrument of evangelization insofar as you witness to the profoundness of the Word of God that touches the hearts of people, and allows a celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Holy Eucharist, which makes one sense the beauty of paradise.

—International meeting of choirs,
November 24, 2018



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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- What doubts about God arise in my heart?
- How do I deal with these moments of uncertainty?

"Who then Can Be Saved?"

By Thomas H. Groome

This is the rhetorical question the disciples asked Jesus after he declared "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Their concern couldn't have been that they were rich; they were poor peasants.



"to buy back," *redemption* connotes that Jesus paid the price for our sins. From the Latin "to make safe," *salvation* means Jesus ensures our safety for eternal life. Both imply a negative condition from which we've been rescued and a positive possibility for which we are empowered.

Rather, they recognized that everyone needs salvation, that we cannot save ourselves, and that the camel is smaller to the needle's eye than our sinful baggage is to eternal life. Jesus replied, "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Those first disciples believed that God was saving the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They embraced faith in Jesus as God's own Son and the Savior of all humanity, the divine intervention that redirected history toward God's reign. They remembered Jesus stating his own sense of purpose as life "more abundantly" (John 10:10), and they began to search for ways to communicate what this means for humanity and creation.

Saved From, Saved For

Two key ideas emerged in Western Christianity—redemption and salvation—portraying Jesus as our Redeemer and Savior. From the Latin

Christians have faith that Jesus has saved us from the powers of sin and evil. He has saved us for living as his disciples, modeling "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Through faithful discipleship, our salvation begins now and is completed in God's eternal presence. By our baptism into union with Christ we access God's saving work in Jesus, and the Church is now God's "universal sacrament of salvation" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 48).

All who have faith in Christ and are baptized into union with him can be saved. Catholicism also emphasizes that Christian faith demands "good works," that we live the faith we profess. With the help of God's grace, we are accountable to follow "the way" that Jesus modeled. Apparently, God's final judgment will focus on our practical love, especially toward those in need (Matthew 25:31–46). Though discipleship is demanding, we take hope in the fact that Jesus has heightened God's mercy toward us.

"Many Dwelling Places"

As Christians, we are confident of God's saving work in Christ. But then, if we are really Christians for whom neighbor knows no limits, we should be concerned about all those who don't come to faith in Jesus, for whatever reason. Can people of every religion (or no religion) be saved?

First, we firmly believe there is one mediator between God and the human race: Jesus. Yet we also remember Jesus saying that God's house has "many dwelling places" (John 14:2). In this light, Catholicism has consistently held that anyone can be saved by Christ through "baptism of desire." This means that all people who do God's will—as best they know it—have a virtual desire for baptism and thus are saved by their implicit faith in Jesus.

When explaining how all people are saved by Jesus and "associated with this paschal mystery," the Second Vatican Council simply said that the Holy Spirit brings this about "in a manner known only to God" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [*Gaudium et Spes*], 22). Or, as Jesus himself said, "for God, all things are possible." +



Lord, you are patient with me and give me time to correct my faults and become a better person. Help me to be more patient and loving toward others.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 16–21

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a / Mt 21:23–27

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45