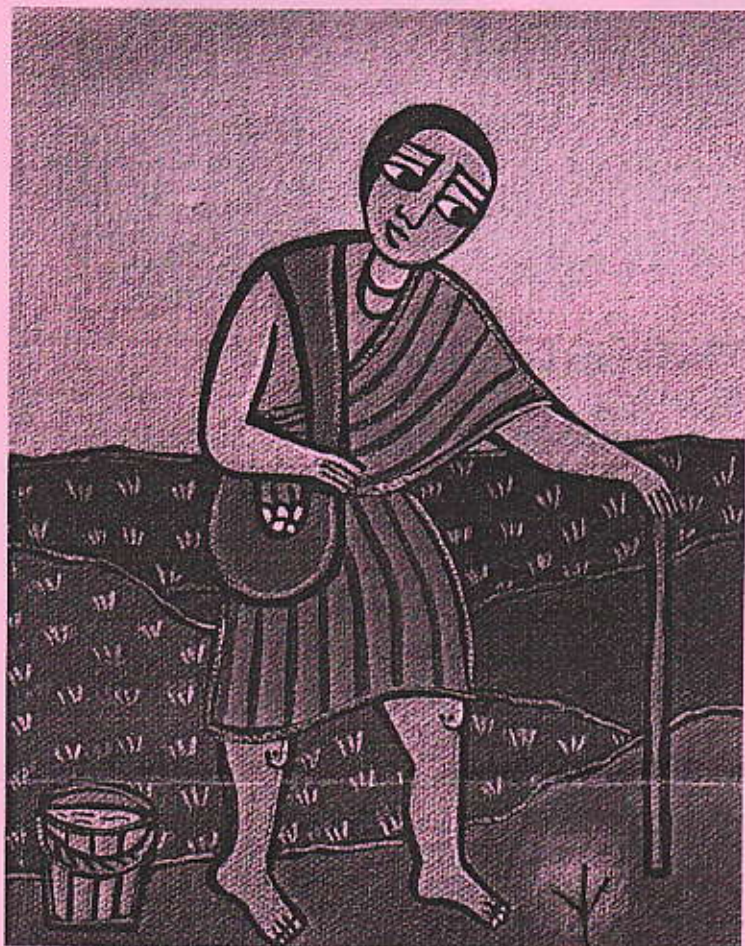


Third Sunday of Advent



Blessing for the Crèche

O God,
you who sent your Son
into an ordinary family
and redeemed all humans
by making him one of us,
we ask you to bless
these figures in our crèche,
figures we have cherished
and collected over time.
May they remind us
of his life with us:
lived among parents,
cows, sheep, and shepherds.
Let them be signs
of your love for us
as we prepare to celebrate your Son's birth.
We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sunday, December 12, 2010 Patience or Paralysis?

Today's Readings: Isaiah 35:1–6a; 10; James 5:7–10; Matthew 11:2–11. The first week of Advent we pondered *light*; the second, *peace*. This week we consider *patience*. Like any virtue, it's multidimensional. We tell children counting the days until Christmas to be patient; at the same time we berate ourselves for not finishing the cards, baking, or shopping. We are rightly impatient with some things: injustice, lies, greed. But with others, it's wise to wait.

How does this puzzling virtue work in today's scriptures? John the Baptist's question to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Matthew 11:3), suggests a man at the end of his rope. The dungeon must have felt dark, damp, and dangerous for John to express such yearning. In the desert blaze, he sounded certain—no shadows there! Now, he may be wondering how long he can last.

So, too, with the farmer in James. Today, headlines shout, "Farmers Lose Hope." The news describes tragedies as family farms collapse.

The message of hope for both figures is the same: the Lord is near. In small increments and growth gradual as a seed's, God comes. Around us we see the signs: people leave hospitals healthier, damaged hearts are repaired or wounds treated. Teachers and therapists bring good news. Many learn to see beyond personal blind spots. What turns paralysis to patience? A force outside ourselves, God who makes deserts bloom and protects seeds through winter. So on this Third Sunday of Advent, traditionally known as *Gaudete* (Rejoicing) Sunday, we can quietly rejoice in patience.

This Week at Home



Monday, December 13

Memorial of Saint Lucy

This young girl was persecuted and killed for her faith in Sicily in 303. Her name in Latin, *Lucia*, means “light,” and in the northern hemisphere, where winter days are so short, many people decorate with colored lights. Throughout the world, Lucy is patron saint of people with eye diseases. Today, light a candle and thank God for the gift of sight. Then pray that, through the intercession of Saint Lucy, we might each bring the light of Christ into the world. Today’s readings: Numbers 24:2–7, 15–17a; Matthew 21:23–27.

Tuesday, December 14

Memorial of Saint John of the Cross

When he was 25, John (1542–1591), a Carmelite friar, was chosen by Saint Teresa of Avila to lead a reform movement among Carmelite men, like the one she had begun with her community of nuns. But some did not want the order reformed. John’s famous work *Dark Night of the Soul* explains a poem he composed while imprisoned by his fellow friars. It describes the soul’s mystical path toward union with God as a time marked by periods of darkness that are spiritually fruitful and lead to light. John has inspired many through his profound mystical life and theology. Today’s readings: Zephaniah 3:1–2, 9–13; Matthew 21:28–32.

Wednesday, December 15

A Word of Hope

In today’s Gospel, as in Sunday’s, John the Baptist, imprisoned, asks for a sign of hope. John must have treasured Jesus’ response. The assurance that the sick were healed and the blind could see must have brightened John’s grim prison cell. You, too, must know someone desperate for good news. Who is lonely, grieving, unemployed, ill, or depressed? Is a spouse, sibling, or child having difficulties? Today, be the person who offers encouraging words to them. Today’s readings: Isaiah 45:6b–8, 18, 21b–25; Luke 7:18b–23.

Thursday, December 16

Bursting into Song

Much of the pre-Christmas advertising is child-centered: buy this toy or game! Ads show us lots of darling toddlers dressed in red and green velvet. In contrast, today’s First Reading speaks to the childless. Barrenness was a curse in Jewish culture of that time, yet the prophet tells the barren that they will be blessed in spite of their situation. God’s blessing will overcome any human stigma. In prayer today, ask for the grace to be a blessing to someone who may feel stigmatized. Today’s readings: Isaiah 54:1–10; Luke 7:24–30.

Friday, December 17

Las Posadas

During the nine days before Christmas, many Spanish-speaking Catholics reenact Joseph and Mary’s search for lodging. Costumed figures walk through the neighborhood (Mary sometimes riding a donkey), knocking at doors, and are refused entrance. At the last place they are welcomed, and a party with piñatas begins. How might we be closing or opening our homes to Christ’s birth this year? Today’s readings: Genesis 49:2, 8–10; Matthew 1:1–17.

Saturday, December 18

Keeping Perspective

As the pressure mounts to buy more perfectly suited gifts, remember how G. K. Chesterton, who died in 1936, once observed that we complain because our Christmas stocking isn’t full, but forget to thank God that we have a leg to put in it. Discuss with family or friends: How many good things do we already have? How many of those were bought in stores? How might this insight affect our Christmas purchasing? Today’s readings: Jeremiah 23:5–8; Matthew 1:18–25.



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Keeping the Seasons
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