

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Third Sunday of Advent

First reading:

(Isaiah 61.1-2, 10-11)

Good News for the Poor

The Book of Isaiah reflects the thoughts and prayers of Israel over at least 200 years.

The original prophet Isaiah was speaking in Jerusalem in 740Bc. Further prophecies were added during the Babylonian Exile, and still more after the return from Exile. Through them all runs the promise that God will send his Spirit upon his Chosen One.

In the first part, comes the wonderful promise of a sevenfold Spirit that we always associate with Confirmation. In the dark days of the Exile came the prophecy of 'my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have sent my Spirit upon him', which is echoed at Jesus' baptism.

Now, after the return from Exile, comes the prophecy of the anointed one to whom the Spirit has been given so that he may heal. All these are fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus also gives his Spirit to his followers, and it is our task, as we live by the Spirit, to heal, to bring good news to the poor and to bind up hearts that are broken.

Question:

In what way is the Spirit at work in the Church today?

Second reading:

(1 Thessalonians 5.16-24)

Joy in the Lord

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul gives his final blessing, asking that they may be kept safe for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are now waiting for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

Paul means it in a very different sense. He was waiting for the coming of Christ at the end of the world, a triumphal procession in which we would join Christ 'in the clouds' as he presented the whole universe to his Father as God's completed kingdom.

We don't see things in such dramatic, pictorial terms, but we do know that the whole universe is focused on God and will reach its fulfilment only when his sovereignty is complete, when the world has been transformed by God's divine life in Christ.

Paul himself, in 1 Corinthians 15, writes of the Resurrection in much more personal terms; it is a transformation after the model of Christ's own Resurrection. We will be drawn into the sphere of God and in some new way share in his divinity, strong instead of weak, incorruptible instead of perishable, glorious instead of contemptible, given life by the Spirit of God.

Question:

What am I planning to do this Christmas to bring God's love and healing just one step further?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Gospel:

(John 1.6-8, 19-28)

A Voice Crying in the Desert

So, John the Baptist came as a witness to the light. In today's gospel reading, he seems rather to refuse witness. He is quite negative, answering with a stalwart and repeated 'No!' He witnesses only: 'There is one standing among you whom you do not know.'

It is not always easy to find Jesus. All the way through the Gospel of John there are misunderstandings about Jesus, as people fail to recognize him for what he is: the Samaritan at the well, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalen beside the empty tomb, even Peter and the disciples as they fish on the Lake.

We can easily become so wrapped up in our own troubles and worries that we fail to recognize the one figure who can bring their solution, although he is standing among us, the one who 'has the words of eternal life'.

He may come to us in a way we do not like, as a corrective, blocking or diverting the way we had chosen. He may come as suffering, disappointment, failure or bereavement. All these may be acts of God's love, to show us the way, although we cannot see it at the time. It is just like John the Baptist, saying steadily 'No!', until eventually we turn around and see Christ as our true light.

Question:

Does Christ confront us in a John the Baptist way? How?
