



**Reflections on the Sunday Readings**  
**December 15, 2019 – Third Sunday of Advent**  
**Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10 Psalm 146: 6-10**  
**James 5: 7-10 Matthew 11: 2-11**

*“The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song.” (Isaiah 35: 1-2a)*

Today, we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent, traditionally called *Gaudete Sunday*. The word *Gaudete* means “rejoice,” and reminds us of the approach of the Solemnity of the Nativity. This weekend, the rose-colored candle is lit on the Advent Wreath, its bright color symbolic of joyful anticipation. Rose-colored vestments are worn; these are used only twice during the liturgical year – the other time being *Laetere Sunday* (another word for “rejoice”), which occurs on the Fourth Sunday of Lent and signifies the hope of the resurrection amidst an otherwise penitential season.

The reading from the Gospel of Matthew is, at first, quite somber. John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets, the one chosen by God to preach a message of repentance, and to prepare the way of the Lord, was perhaps experiencing what could be called “a dark night of the soul.” Imprisoned by King Herod and awaiting his fate, John can be forgiven for wondering – as so many do when reflecting upon life in their final days and hours – if he was following the right course. I am sure that if we were facing his faith, we might question our path as well. John sent his disciples to ask Jesus, the same man whom he had baptized, “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*” Jesus could have answered with a simple, “Yes!” Instead, echoing the words of the Prophet Isaiah in the first reading, he told John’s disciples: “*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.*” To put it more simply: See and believe!

In a sense, seeing even a great prophet like John the Baptist have his doubts can be reassuring to those of us who struggle with our faith. Here was the man who, as an infant, had leapt in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, who had baptized Jesus, who saw the heavens open for Jesus and the Spirit descending like a dove. He was witness to the voice from heaven saying, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” And yet, beset by imprisonment and anxiety, he sought to reaffirm his faith. How often do we seek reassurance of our own faith, especially in times of pain and difficulty?

As we continue our journey in the Season of Advent, let us embrace the gift of the Eucharist, the physical presence of Jesus’ Precious Body and Blood, and allow Our Lord to reassure us, to strengthen us, and to fill us with the grace we need to live each day as his disciples. With renewed conviction, we can joyfully anticipate the celebration of Christmas, when we recall the birth of Our Savior into humanity. Christmas is coming! Hurry, the time is near!