

Encountering Christ

*Prayerfully preparing for the Sunday Mass,
with special prayers for our school families*

2 Read

The Gospel for Sunday 17th December 2023
A Voice Crying in the Desert

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then, 'they asked, 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not,' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: "A voice that cries in the wilderness: make a straight way for the Lord."' Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you - unknown to you - the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Taken from John 1:6-8. 19-28. The Third Sunday in Advent, Year B



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering the Gospel, continue by reading this reflection.

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 that '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; people fail to recognise him for what he is: there's the Samaritan at the well, Nicodemus in the night, Mary Magdalene 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 recognise the one figure who can provide the solution to them, 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 have chosen. He may come as suffering, disappointment, failure or bereavement. All of these may be acts of God's love, to show us the way, though 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.

How can I find Jesus in the crowded events of my busy life? He often comes in unexpected ways. Is he in the quiet voice of a friend? Is he in the anger of someone I have annoyed? Is he in the rebuke of someone who knows me better than I know myself? Is he in my failures and frustrations?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

1 Relax

Set aside 10 - 15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. Call to mind the love that God has for you.

Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present. Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Thank God for any insight you may have received.

Then ask God to bless you with a spiritual gift to help you act on any resolution you have made. Perhaps: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, joy or something else.

5 Remember

After praying for your loved ones, please remember to pray for the Church and particularly for the families connected to our schools. You may want to conclude this special weekly time with a simple prayer such as: St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church, pray for us. Mary, Star of Evangelisation, pray for us. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph.

Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph
wednesdayword.org



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WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 17th December 2023



1

1st Reading: *Isaiah 61:1-2. 10-11*

Good News for the Poor

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. 'I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity, like a bridegroom wearing his wreath, like a bride adorned in her jewels. For as the earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will the Lord make both integrity and praise spring up in the sight of the nations.'



The Book of Isaiah reflects the thoughts and prayers of Israel over at least two hundred years. The original prophet Isaiah was speaking in Jerusalem in 740 BC. Further prophecies were added during the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BC, 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 there is the wonderful promise of a sevenfold Spirit which 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, we are presented with this prophecy in today's reading of the Anointed One to whom the Spirit has been given so that he may heal. All these promises 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.

What does it mean to you to "live by the Spirit"?

2

2nd Reading: *1 Thessalonians 5:16-24*

Joy in the Lord

Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus. Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything - hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil. May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and he will not fail you.



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 was waiting 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 always 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.

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

“ We do know that the whole universe is focused on God. ”

The Wednesday Word Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God

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