

Third Sunday of Advent, Year A

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:1-10

The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

³Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.”

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;
⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.
⁹No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Psalm 146:5-10 *The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down.* (Ps. 146:8)

⁵Happy are they who have the God of Jacob ¹for their help, whose hope is in the ¹LORD their God;
⁶**who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that ¹is in them; who keeps promis- ¹es forever;**
⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to ¹those who hunger.
The LORD sets the ¹captive free.
⁸**The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD lifts up those who ¹are bowed down;**
the LORD ¹loves the righteous.
⁹The LORD cares ¹for the stranger;
the LORD sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way ¹of the wicked.
¹⁰**The LORD shall ¹reign forever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. ¹Hallelujah!**

SECOND READING: James 5:7-10

In anticipation of the Lord's coming, Christians are called upon to cultivate patience rather than discontent.

⁷Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist expects the Messiah to bring God's judgment upon the earth (Matt. 3:11-12). From a prison cell, he wonders whether Jesus is the one who will do this. Jesus' response indicates that God's reign is indeed being fulfilled already through healing and restoration.

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."