

Dec 15,2019 Readings: no. 7, p. 11;BG, p. 7 1st Reading: Isaiah 35.1-Ga, 10 2nd  
 Reading: James 5.7-10 Gospel: Matthew 11.2-11  
 3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

We feel excitement in the air. People are on the move. Social life is in full swing. Our highways and airports are crowded, and I don't have to tell anyone about parking lots. But here at St. Peter's "Those whom the Lord has ransomed have" returned, and entered this sanctuary singing, and crowned with everlasting joy. We assemble to praise God with joy and gladness; sorrow and morning sent packing. "The prophet Isaiah speaks to us of a dessert coming to life; of flowers blooming; and of joyful song. Our God delivers us from austerity to abundance, from despair to hope, and from sadness to joy. Brothers and sisters, we should not want to be among the frightened. Any fearful inclination, our perishable nature suffers, is no match for God's grace and the joy that flows from knowing Jesus. Isaiah describes liberty and freedom and we are invited to participate in God's splendour.

The Incarnate God who enters the human condition to set us free of our vices and orient us towards eternal Joy. Bondage is a distasteful experience. To be held captive is to have taken from us, the precious gift of our free-will. With our autonomy restricted, a piece of our very being is held ransom.

However, and almost irrationally, we sometimes choose to enrol in captivity. Seduced by glamour and the countless allures of the world, we surrender our will for a fleeting moment of relief. But that not who, or, what we are design to be! In the deepest part of our being, we will always yearn for a freedom, that only God's children experience. Friends, Jesus is the physical God; and we call on Him throughout Advent to bring us to freedom by Word and Sacrament.

A letter from James in our second reading today is one of Scripture's Catholic letters addressed to the Jewish/Christian diaspora. "Be patience", James says, "for the coming of the Lord." Waiting is difficult, at best, but let me suggest, that bearing it without hope is even worst. Because the human condition must deal with uncertainty, we do better to approach it with patience and hope. Believers have seen the purpose of the Lord and it is to satisfy hope, bring peace, and incite joy throughout all creation. Let Christmas arrive! It doesn't need to begin until the preparations of Advent are satisfied.

One of the first casualties in the lack of a patient environment is sound judgement. Anxious with delay, we dip towards impulse and blame. With a poison word, a thoughtless gesture, and a worried heart, we stab at those we care most about.

The first thing Paul mentions when describing the way of love to the Corinthians, is that "love is patient, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." It's a popular selection at Marriages.

St. Paul, St. John the Baptist, and I share something important in common. We have all done time in prison. But, before you mob Fr Johnathan after Mass and the bishop, let me explain, that I attended to prisoners during my years in northern communities. The Lutheran pastor and I served as the town's prison keepers. My good friend would preach to the fellows for half the night, and I would spell him off, picking Merle Haggard tunes until sunrise. Anyway, when release came, I was never too sure, who was happiest to be going free. But again, to be crystal clear, Paul and John are chained behind bars, whereas, I am being well-compensated.

None-the-less, John, is unclear about rumours he hears circulating around the cellblock. "Is Jesus really the One, who is to come, or does God require of them, a bit more patience?" He puts together a reconnaissance mission to the outside and Jesus turns them around saying, "Go and tell John what hear and see." Lofty acclaim is then given by Jesus to this servant of God.

Holy Mother Church confers two Sacrament of Service. Along with Sacred Marriage, Holy Orders is an occasion of great communal joy. Both Sacraments of Service emerge from, and are sustained by, Baptism and Eucharist. In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, three degrees or offices are described. They are; bishop, priest and deacon. The word deacon is derived from the Greek term for service and so he is sacramentally configured to Christ the Servant. In St Peter's we are so blessed to have Deacon Stephen among us. He bears the name of the Church's first deacon and martyr. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke records that seven people are selected to relieve the Apostles of their taxing workload. They chose Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," just like our Deacon Stephen.

The Office of Deacon is restored to its permanent Apostolic dignity by the work of the Second Vatican Council. Priest and Deacon share in the Local Ordinary's or bishop's ministry, as brothers in Christ. Service of the Word, the Altar, and Charity are three legs of a stool that hold up Diaconal ministry.

During the ordination rite, after investiture with stole and dalmatic, the bishop presents the newly ordained with the Book of Gospels and says, "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach. Be a herald of the Gospel, the bishop tells us, just like was John the Baptist!

Amen