

*Reflections
from the
St. Cronan Community*

Advent, 2021

The Third Week of Advent



Third Sunday of Advent

Zep 3:14-81a

Phil 4:407

December 12, 2021

Lk 3:10-18

“What you see, depends on where you stand.”

When I read the readings for the 3rd Sun. of Advent (Gaudete) the word that struck me was REJOICE. St. Paul says: “Rejoice in God, always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, God is near.”

What are we looking at in our world today? Shorter days with darkness coming earlier and earlier; the Delta variant continuing to penetrate many, especially the unvaccinated here and all over the world; people suffering from famine, displacement, illnesses and disease; and prices rising for food, gasoline and heat for the winter.

The Pandemic has disrupted our lives, our relationships, our children, our jobs, our health, our security. Even our churches are struggling to gather the faithful while restrictions are still in place. This word: *rejoice* does not come readily to our lips, in our minds or in our hearts. Some days we long for the good old days when we were freer to breathe, to interact, to come and go,

But St. Paul adds meaning to the *rejoice* word, telling us: ‘God is near.’

Our challenge is to look around us, this day, this week and see where God is...surely in the faces of family and friends and in the pews at St. Cronan’s. Look around and we might see God in neighbors, strangers, Afghan refugees and people who are sick, lonely and out of work. Look beyond the nightly news and see God coming, coming, coming.

God is reaching out to us, to our troubled world, waiting to be born again.

Listen! Maybe God is saying: Rejoice, I am near, for those who have eyes, ears, and hearts open to see and welcome me.

-Mary Nolan, BVM



Monday, Third Week of Advent

Isaiah 35:1-10

December 13, 2021

Ps 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14

Lk 5:17-26

Memorial of St. Lucy

Sometimes Scripture is pure poetry. In Numbers we hear,

*“Of one who sees what the Almighty sees,
enraptured, and with eyes unveiled;*

They are like gardens beside a stream, like the cedars planted by the LORD.

*His wells shall yield free-flowing waters,
he shall have the sea within reach.”*

What beautiful words and images, leading us to His presence and vision. Like the feast of St. Lucy today, the patroness of sight and light, we are called to see anew and imagine these visions. I always wanted to be that kid who ‘had a vivid imagination,’ but not so much as I was the rule-follower, compliant person who struggled to get outside the box. I wasn’t using much vision. Yet, I have since cultivated a sense of wonder, beauty, and imagination in my personal and professional life, the ability to ‘see’ what others may not. Contemplative imaginative prayer I learned while receiving The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola 2 years ago has changed my life, given me new vision and new ways to experience Scripture and the world. As a mental health counselor, I get to help people reimagine themselves and their lives anew, ‘see’ themselves changing.

Advent, to me is a time of imagining God’s coming and the Psalmist’s prayer: *“Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me,*

for you are God my savior” gives us such a vision of being led to hope.

Matthew’s words also lead us to imagine the scene of Jesus being questioned about the origin of his authority. I see myself as one of those debaters about the conundrum of Jesus’ power and ‘scheming’ as the chief priests have done. I would be just that skeptical, not imaginative at all. I would want facts. Where is my vision, however? Jesus returns their question with a question. This helps me be ok with the uncertainties of the life we live and find comfort in faith.

One of my favorite writings is by Rainer Maria Rilke in Letters to A Young Poet, Letter #4, he says ‘be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and ***try to love the questions themselves...live the questions now.***’ So may we, this Advent love the questions we have, enrich our sense of imagination with scripture, and anticipate Christ’s birth as the free-flowing waters of new life.



Christine Lakey

Tuesday, Third Week of Advent

Zep 3:1-2, 9-13

December 14, 2021

Ps 96:34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19 and 23

Mt 21:28-32

Memorial of St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

In today's gospel, Jesus is speaking with chief priests and elders, authorities in their communities. He says, "A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' The son said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?"

Jesus goes on to rebuke the priests and elders for not heeding John the Baptist's message, whereas those on the margins of society did. Here He offers a firm reminder of what it truly means to follow His path and to live with integrity. It is the first son who, when all is said and done, does the will of the father.

The willingness to change one's mind implies a stance of reflectiveness and curiosity. Such a stance allows us to make sure that we are listening to the voice of God in whatever way God is speaking to us in the here and now. Merely hearing a message does not necessarily mean that we have reflected upon it enough to fully integrate what is being asked of us in the moment—just because we have heard, does not mean we have truly *listened*. This is as true in our relationships with our friends and family as it is in our relationship with God. Listening deeply is a practice that we must continue to cultivate.

John of the Cross's teachings on prayer and contemplation provide a road map for how to listen deeply. He emphasizes the importance of still showing up in times of "aridity," such as when we are bored, tired, or hurting. When we are able to continue showing up and listening to one another and to God during those moments, we are opening ourselves up to a deeper, more subtle understanding than we would have had if we had not persevered.

Loren Gaillardetz

Wednesday, Third Week of Advent December 15, 2021

Isaiah 45:6c-8, 18, 21c-25

Psalms 85: 9ab, 10, 11-14

Luke 7:18b-23



God as designer! I have always thought of God as Creator, of course, but not as a *designer*—as one who plans a house or garden or interior for a client, researching what they most need. THIS is the designer and “maker of the earth...not creating it to be a waste (we wouldn’t expect that) but designing it to be *lived in.*” Wow! God knows that we humans need functionality AND beauty. At this time of year, don’t you marvel at the leaf “snow” beneath your feet -- variously colored and shaped leaves from maple and oak and ginkgo trees? I am touched as I hear *God* praying in this passage for what has been needed throughout human history and particularly at this time: justice.

Let justice descend, O heavens, like dew from above,
Like gentle rain let the skies drop it down.
Let the earth open and salvation bud forth;
Let justice also spring up.

May it be so. May it be so.

Martha Stegmaier

Thursday, Third Week of Advent

Isaiah 54:1-10

December 16, 2021

Luke 7:24-30

“Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord who has mercy on you”

Isaiah

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were visited by numerous prophets but many did not listen to them and often turned to legalism, relying on themselves rather than relying on God and His word. Ultimately, God abandoned them.

Years later God sent John the Baptist to prepare for the promised Messiah. Because John was an odd man who lived a simple life, wearing hair shirts and living on locusts and berries, people found it difficult to accept his prophecy. Jesus spoke to the crowd about John: “What did you go out to the desert to find? A reed swayed by the wind? What did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine garments?” The world values attractive, successful, wealthy people, but God values and uses everyone. How often do we judge by appearances or status, rather than be present to whomever God provides in our lives?

I find myself nodding in agreement as I hear these words. But when I feel bereft, I lament and shake my fist at God often feeling abandoned by Him. During my illness and Don’s illness and subsequent death, I found I had to daily renew my commitment to rest quietly in God’s presence.

Without time spent with God, I would try to plan and prepare, relying on my own ideas and expectations and would often despair when they didn’t work out. However, when I rested quietly in God, I was often surprised and comforted by the people and experiences he brought me each day. I found that God never abandoned me. Instead, I sometimes got in the way of His work. By taking time to connect daily with God, I was sustained in ways I didn’t know were possible. Don has come into the fullness of his life, but I know that my journey here is to continue to rely on God and trust Him daily.

Yvonne DeHart



Friday, Third Week of Advent

Gen 49:2, 8-10

1:1-17

December 17, 2021

Ps 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17

Mt

So much can happen in a single day. You start off the morning with all cylinders humming. You're on time for work and arrive with a smile. You get a call from a friend you've been wanting to hear from. The sun is out and you have already checked off several items on your to-do list. Then out of the blue something happens that really shakes your world. The joy and harmony of the morning have shattered and you can only think of the friend who died, the fender-bender you've just endured, the bad job evaluation, another horrific racist incident on the news... Suddenly dark clouds hide the benevolence of the sun. When this happens to me, I lose perspective, and forget that our caring God is always showering me with love.

For me today's gospel is the tedious, excessively male list of Jesus' ancestors. I'm sure the writer of this gospel had a reason to record these names carefully, but they don't speak much to me now. I suppose they convey a sweep of history and were likely people held in great esteem by the Jews who would have easily recognized them. But they say nothing of the daily struggles of each individual, the ups and downs that can seem so cataclysmic at times, the frequent disappointments that form us as human beings who become faithful or hateful, part of the solution or part of the problem. Rather than recalling the old Testament figures who lie far beyond my imagination, I call to mind the heroes of our community at St. Cronan's. If we are indeed the hands and feet of the Christ in our neighborhood and our world, we, too, are the genealogy of Jesus in the here and now. I know some of the joys and sorrows that individuals among us have endured—you know some, too. Through this knowing of each other by our prayers of the faithful, our small group meetings, chats after the “song that sends us forth,” blessings given before surgeries, sharing coffee and donuts, working side by side at the food pantry...Yes, we can each compose a genealogy of Jesus in these last few days before Christmas.

When we hear the psalmist say, “Justice shall flourish in our time and fullness of Peace forever”, let's shift our view of the end time – not a far distant, perfect future, but the faithfulness we can see every week as we gather to celebrate Eucharist.

In us shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;
as long as the sun our efforts shall remain.
Through our community, may his name be blessed forever.

Trish Curtis
Forest Park Montessori School

Saturday, Third Week of Advent

December 18, 2021

Jer 23:5-8

Ps 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19

Mt 1:18-25

Today's readings contain a contrast. In the psalm the people ask God to have their king do justice and to rescue "the lowly and the poor." God answers that request in the reading from Jeremiah by saying that He will indeed send a king who shall govern wisely.

The gospel reading tells us how that promise is fulfilled. It is not with the grand coronation of an earthly king, but by the whisper of an angel. Joseph is troubled by Mary's being pregnant before they have lived together, and decides to quietly divorce her. The angel reveals to Joseph in a dream that the Holy Ghost has intervened and Mary will bear a son who will save His people from their sins. Joseph changes his mind and takes Mary into his home.

When we pray aren't we often like the early Israelites? We ask for the big things: world peace, an end to poverty, violence and racism; the ordination of women. But do we ever take the time and be still enough to listen for an answer? Are we ever like Joseph and open during our quietest, most restful moments to hear God's message?

It's unlikely that God will let us know that He's stopping the Russians from amassing troops at the Ukrainian border. But if we are thoughtful and quiet we might hear God urging us to apologize to our brother, or to help with Winter Outreach, or to shovel our neighbor's snow. God urged Joseph to reconcile with Mary. And Joseph heard Him.

Mike Forst

