

Commentary on the Readings for Today, December 17, 2023

The Third Sunday in Advent

Have you ever been a witness? This question usually sets up an uneasy feeling because it implies a trial, a court and lawyers and judges. However, this isn't always the case. For example, if we have been to a new restaurant and enjoyed a superb meal, we will want to tell our friends about it. If we have been to the theater and heard a new singer thrill us with his or her talents, we will want to remember that experience and share it with others. The Readings for today are about witnessing the great things that God has done for us.

The **First Reading** is from the *Prophet Isaiah (61:1-11)*. The prophet is speaking to the people of Israel soon after the end of the Babylonian Exile, (late 6th century BC). The Israelites are struggling to rebuild their lives, their cities and the temple. The Prophet Isaiah is sent by God to give witness and a message of hope to the people that their struggles are not in vain and that they will receive a "year of favor from the Lord." Jesus quotes Isaiah's same words in *Luke's Gospel* and says, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." (**Luke 4:21**)

The **Responsorial Hymn** is from *Luke (1:46-54)*. This hymn is not from a Psalm as is the norm. Rather, it is the great Magnificat of the Virgin Mary (also from Luke's gospel). Here Mary is witnessing to the greatness of God and pointing out the favor bestowed on her, a lowly servant. We should consider Mary as a role model of great humility and follow her lead in witnessing to those around us about the wonderful graces and blessings received from God.

The **Second Reading** is from the *First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (5:16-24)*. Here also, Paul is witnessing to the greatness of God and exhorting his flock to lead not just good lives but exemplary lives in preparation for the "coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The **Gospel Reading** is from the beginning of the *Gospel of John (1:6-8, 19-28)*. Here, as in the readings for last Sunday (December 7), John the Baptist is the central figure. John the Evangelist positions the Baptist as the chief witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. This was the Baptist's role and he fulfilled it well. We should not only try to understand John the Baptist's role, but we should also try to imitate it.

Witnessing, or evangelizing, is not easy for most of us, but it is what we are all called to do - some more than others. One of our top responsibilities as Catholic/Christians is to bring someone into the fold who might otherwise be lost. Wow! That is quite a responsibility! Yes, but look at the joy in heaven over one sinner that is saved. So, have you witnessed to someone recently about Jesus and His Church? Like a popular commercial says, "Try it! You'll like it!" Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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