

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

We have many reasons to rejoice as we wait for the coming of Jesus with expectant hope. As people in recovery, we witness God do miraculous things in our own lives and in the lives of those walking alongside us. The Third Sunday of Advent (also known as Gaudete Sunday) invites us to notice this quiet, steady renewal—to see how grace has already begun to bloom where there was once only dryness and discouragement.

This Sunday's First Reading sets a tone of renewal and joy (Isaiah 35:1-6a):

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song... Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Many of us knew this “desert” well. Addiction and compulsive behavior created landscapes of fear, numbness, mistrust, and spiritual dryness. The things we turned to for relief eventually fed our despair. Yet God does not abandon us there. Recovery becomes a way God gently uproots us from barren soil and plants us in new ground, where honesty, surrender, and humility can take root.

Saint James encourages us to trust this slow unfolding (James 5:7-10):

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Recovery demands this kind of patient perseverance. Growth takes time. We allow God to direct the pace of our healing instead of forcing immediate results. Our part is willingness; God's part is transformation.

In this Sunday's Gospel, John the Baptist—confined in prison—sends his disciples to Jesus with a question many of us have whispered in early recovery: “Are you the one?” Jesus responds with evidence of God's healing work (Matthew 11:2-5):

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to him with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.”

These signs mirror the slow awakening we experience in recovery. Where we were once blind, truth becomes clear. Where fear paralyzed us, we begin to walk in freedom. Parts of our hearts that felt deadened by shame come alive again. And we discover the good news of God's mercy through the love of our recovery communities.

Gaudete Sunday invites us to rejoice—not because everything is fixed, but because Christ is near. God is already at work in the deserts of our lives, making them bloom one day at a time.

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

SECOND READING James 5:7-10

GOSPEL Matthew 11:2-11

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you see God bringing life to “desert places” in your recovery?
- How are you learning to be patient with your healing process?
- What new signs of hope or freedom have you noticed this Advent?

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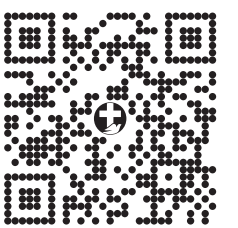
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