

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of December, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 63:16b-17,19b;64:2-7

Ps 80:(4) 2-3,15-16,18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37



Reflect:

As we prepare for Christmas, we're thinking about how to show appreciation to the special people in our lives by choosing gifts that will be meaningful to them. And yet, assuming that we can actually find (or make) something that will be appreciated, will the gift really make a difference in the long run? Which ones made a long-lasting impact?

Since Christmas is the celebration of the birthday of Jesus, let's remember to give him a gift, too – a long-lasting gift. God deserves more gifts than anyone else, but what can we give to someone who already has everything?

Or does he?

What gift can you give to Jesus that will have an eternal impact, a gift that no one else can give him, a gift he doesn't already have? Here's the answer: What have you been withholding from him? What talent, ministry, commitment or change in lifestyle?

Today's first reading reminds us that God is our Father. The responsorial Psalm asks the Father to help us turn to him. The second reading gives thanks to God for all that he has done for us. So – what gift can you give to God to express your appreciation for what he has given to you?

In the Gospel reading, we're reminded of the need to prepare – to actually do something that makes a difference – for the coming of Christ. This not only refers to his Second Coming; it's also about the day when he comes for us as we breathe our last earthly breaths. And it's about the way he wants to come to you during this year's Season of Christmas. And it's about the way he is coming to you right now, today.

There's something new that he wants to give you. When he offers it, will he find you doing what's right (the first reading)? Will he find you using your spiritual gifts (the second reading)? Will he find you alert and ready to do his bidding (the Gospel reading)?

This Advent, take notice of the gifts he gives you and become aware of the gifts you can give to him that he doesn't already have. It should make an eternal difference – for him *and* for you.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † List the gifts that God has given to you.
- † Next, think about how much appreciation you have given to God for the gifts on that list. Do you know how much he appreciates your appreciation?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Name some of the obvious ways that Jesus comes to us today.
- † What are some unexpected ways that Jesus has revealed himself to you?
- † What will you do this Advent to become more aware of Jesus coming to you?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

3rd Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28



Reflect:

John the Baptist came to "testify to the light." What does this mean?

We know that Jesus is the Light of Truth shining in the darkness. And we know that his Spirit enlightens us in the truth so that we can be saved from the destructive forces of our sins and follow our Savior to heaven. But what was the testimony given by John? How did he testify to the light? And how does this affect our lives today?

John's testimony was: "I am not the Christ. I am a voice. A voice in the wilderness. A voice in the desert." And his testimony brings us to the Light of Christ by challenging us with: "Where is your life arid and dry? Listen! Christ is coming to meet you there! Make a bee-line to him! Stop wandering around! Repent, change, do whatever is necessary to look for Jesus so that you can find him. He is coming to you!"

We've all experienced times when Jesus seems distant, unavailable, not present to us when we need him. What has opened your eyes to his presence? Whose voice has turned you back to God? It's time to do the same for others, to bring glad tidings to the poor (as it says in the reading from Isaiah), to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to those who are held captive in their sins, and to announce how to be blessed by a close friendship with the Lord.

We all have the same testimony and the same calling as John had: We are all supposed to be voices heard above the din of the world. Many souls are lost in the wilderness of confusion, hopelessness, pain, heartache, and despair, not to mention sin. Is it loving to be so quiet that they cannot hear the truth? Certainly not! Someday we will have to explain to Jesus why we ignored our baptismal calling to be the voice that could have helped others find him.

What kind of a voice do you have? Because we have Christ within us, our very lives are the voice. Even if our vocal chords do not utter a single word, the way we live in the light is how we speak the truth of the light. The better we live the truth, the louder and clearer is our message.

What people choose to do with our message is up to them. It's up to us to speak it so that they're given that choice.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How has your life been changed by your faith in Jesus? What evil has been conquered, what darkness has been overcome? This is your testimony! Write a couple of pages about it to become more familiar with it. This will prepare you so that you can explain it to others when they ask you why you have faith.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How has the Spirit of the Lord anointed you? What gifts do you have that enable you to give to the poor (the financially poor, the emotionally starving, the spiritually hungry) or to heal broken hearts?

† How has God used you to provide liberty to captives and release to prisoners?

† How are these a testimony that teach others about Jesus?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Feast of the Holy Family

December 31, 2017

Read:

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 or Gen 15:1-6; 21:1-3
Ps 128:1-5 or Ps 105:1-6, 8-9
Col 3:12-21 or Heb 11:8,11-12,17-19
Luke 2:22-40

Reflect:

"Joy mixed with drama marks the fifth [joyful] mystery, the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple." Saint John Paul the Great wrote this in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, his interesting encyclical about the Rosary.

He continued: "Here he appears in his divine wisdom as he listens and raises questions, already in effect one who 'teaches'. The revelation of his mystery as the Son wholly dedicated to his Father's affairs proclaims the radical nature of the Gospel, in which even the closest of human relationships are challenged by the absolute demands of the Kingdom. Mary and Joseph, fearful and anxious, 'did not understand' his words."

We, too, often fail to understand the words of Jesus. His teachings challenge us to accept a more difficult life, a life of doing good to our enemies, turning the cheek and going the extra mile, a life of courageously standing up for the truth and adhering to high moral standards that are counter-cultural.

Our preference, when living this way is inconvenient or unpleasant, is to rationalize and make excuses for our worldly behavior. But once we truly understand the demands of the Kingdom of God, we see their benefits and we obey gladly.

Without this understanding, we have to simply trust that the words of Jesus are right and true. Like Mary and Joseph, we need to ponder in our hearts what we don't understand, while moving forward and doing what Jesus wants us to do.

As challenging as this is, that's when we discover how amazing God can be.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What teaching of the Church have you rationalized away so that you don't have to obey it?
- † Or what teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5,6,7) or elsewhere in the Gospels do you excuse yourself from?
- † How much is your disobedience due to not understanding what is really being taught? What will you do to seek and gain a better understanding?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How meaningful is the Holy Family to you?
- † What is it about the relationships between Jesus, Mary and Joseph that appeals to you?
- † What has this taught you about God's Kingdom?

Comments/Prayer Requests or spiritual resolutions for the New Year: