

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2015, Week 1

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; people dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand."

"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living person on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive, all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Many of us know some degree of woundedness and easily empathise with persons and communities adversely affected by very traumatic experiences. Our natural tendency is to be sympathetic to all who encounter a seismic shaking of *the powers of heaven* in their lives.

When something of this magnitude happens, be it though abuse, war, death, illness etc., it takes time to pick up the pieces. This gospel passage is good news in that it reminds us that God also seeks to help, as suggested by the line "*And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory... for your liberation is near at hand*".

Present day realities, however, frequently remind us of how slow the work of recovery, restoration and healing can be. Think for a moment of the people of Haiti or of victims of human atrocities. Such signs, Christ suggests, ought in the first instance to lead us to prayer. Why? Because it is through prayer that we receive the graces necessary to prevent the coarsening of our hearts in the face of hardship. Grace, to quote St. Thomas Aquinas, builds on nature, empowering us to be true instruments of the Holy Spirit in our broken messed-up world and allowing us "*stand with confidence before the Son of Man*".

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 20 of Advent booklet

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Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2015, Week 2.

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (Luke 3:1-6)

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth.
And all humankind shall see the salvation of God.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Only in recent times have I succeeded in getting behind John the Baptist's austerity so as to revere the sacred presence, working in, with and through him. It is the same sacred presence pervading your life and mine – the sacred presence that seeks everyone's ultimate fulfilment and that continues to encourage us each time we ponder a sacred text such as this.

Today, as I pray with this text, I am full of admiration for John, not only for his ministry but equally for his initial yeses to God's word: the yes by which he placed himself beyond distracting voices (the wilderness), the yes by which he assented to give Jesus greater prominence than himself.

Today millions of Christians, prompted by and in union with the same sacred presence, follow John's example of fidelity to God's word. Like John they daily dedicate their lives to helping others encounter Christ in situations no less harsh or challenging. To contend with the cold face of aggressive secularisation in one's family and community or to risk imprisonment and death for the love of Christ and His Church requires a special grace. Let us ask our gracious Lord to bestow it abundantly and let us give thanks too that no one is ever alone in such work. The sacred presence, better known to us as the Holy Spirit, always always accompanies.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

(Go to page 28.)

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2015, Week 3.

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke: (Lk 3:10-18)

When all the people asked John, "What must we do?" he answered, "If anyone has two coats he must share with the person who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same". There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said, "Master, what must we do?" He said to them, "Exact no more than your rate." Some soldiers asked him in their turn, "What about us? What must we do?" He said to them, "No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!"

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, "I baptize you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear the threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out." As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone : A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Every year the advertising industry invests billions in getting our attention and they have become expert at it. One of the things they understand is that we desire constant happiness for ourselves and others. The effectiveness of the industry, however, is not measured by human happiness or well-being but sales. Every advert also carries a subliminal message "Spend, spend, spend" ... and not just for Christmas! In fact the industry passed the fruit of their labours in relation to Christmas over to the media months ago and are now busy working on how to encourage us take summer holidays etc..

Today's Gospel is also centred in human happiness and well-being, but not just our own. Through John the Baptist's preaching we are invited to review our relationships with our personal belongings, our income provider and with persons we are called to serve. It reminds us that a truly good life is forever tied with justice, and that we usurp our true nature each time we make god's of ourselves.

Much of this teaching is not unique to Christianity. Indeed I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's teaching "Live simply so that others may simply live". For us, however, there is a related question: If we are not true to these demands are we being true to our baptism and our identity as adopted children of the Father?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 35 of Advent booklet.

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Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2015, Week 4

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke: (1:39-45)

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

The great American novelist, Gore Vidal, famously said "When a friend of mine succeeds, something inside me dies!". There was no sense of that in Mary. Mary had just been told that she was to become the mother of God and that, by the way, her elderly cousin Elizabeth was also to give birth to a child. The news about Elizabeth was good but it bore no comparison to the extraordinary life-changing, world-changing news that Mary had received from the Angel Gabriel. Yet Mary had the ability to put her own news aside, and rush to be with her cousin, in order to share in her joy.

Joy is a good word and it captures the essence of that beautiful encounter between Mary and Elizabeth as given to us by St. Luke. Two women full of joy for each other's good news.

Joy is a hall-mark of the Christmas season that is almost upon us. This last week of preparation can be stressful. There is still so much to do, so many expectations to meet and we still have not decided upon that gift for the relative that is impossible to buy for!

But if we are only feeling stressed and anxious something in our preparations has gone wrong. Joy ought to be there too. The joy that Good News has come into a dark and difficult world, a joy that like Mary and Elizabeth we are not meant to keep to ourselves, but rather to share with others.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 44 of Advent booklet.

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