

## Readings for December 30<sup>th</sup> in the Octave of Christmas

FIRST READING: John 2:12-17

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John:

I am writing to you, children, because your sins have been forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the Evil One. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God remains in you, and you have conquered the Evil One. Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10

***Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!***

Give to the LORD, you families of nations, give to the LORD glory and praise; give to the LORD the glory due his name!

***Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!***

Bring gifts, and enter his courts; worship the LORD in holy attire. Tremble before him, all the earth.

***Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!***

Say among the nations: The LORD is king. He has made the world firm, not to be moved; he governs the peoples with equity.

***Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice!***

GOSPEL: Luke 2:36-40

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

## Reflection for December 30<sup>th</sup> in the Octave of Christmas

When I read the scripture stories, often I read them in light of some of my experiences. In 1984, close friends of mine asked me to be godfather to their first born, their daughter. I had been a priest for close to five years at that time and I was, aside from being their friend, the family priest. They wanted me to do the baptism. If I celebrated the baptism I could not be the godfather at the same time. They wanted a proxy to stand in for me.

I have done many baptisms throughout my years as an ordained Catholic minister. I had never been a godparent before. None of my siblings have ever been married or have been a parent, so the likelihood of having the opportunity to participate as a godparent was unlikely. I insisted that my participation at the baptism was to be as the godfather. This meant I had to find an acceptable celebrant. They had another priest friend. I contacted him. He was in the process of leaving the priesthood to get married. He refused. I then asked the deacon at the parish where I was assigned if he was available. He was. He was also married and was a father. This is a critical element to my reminiscence.

When the ceremony was over, my friend's wife and the mother of my new goddaughter, cuddled her in her arms and remarked to the deacon, "Isn't she the most beautiful baby you've ever seen?" She beamed all the delight, joy and pride that a mother could display. He smiled back to reply, "I'm sorry not to agree with you; I'm the father of four of the most beautiful daughters myself." Every parent sees their baby as the best, as did Joseph and Mary.

As one who has held many new babies at their baptism, I always express my delight and hope for them to their parents. Their lives are always open to the possibilities of life; their entire lives are ahead of them as possibility. Parents will always cherish those moments too, as they see their adult children as the babes-in-arms they once were. I'm sixty eight. My mother sees me as her baby still. My goddaughter is thirty seven. I can't help but remember her as a new born too.

Given this, I interpret this passage through a lens of sentiment. Babies always represent our hopes, dreams and aspirations. It's important to note that this passage was written not by a chronicler, historian or biographer. It was written on the basis of a parent's recollection many years after the events and in light of Jesus' entire life. Luke wrote this passage after the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was part of Luke's lived experience. Had these events never happened, how would Mary's memory be effected if Jesus had been a carpenter like his dad? We read this story knowing who Jesus would become. From the perspective of faith, we believe him to be the Son of God, Messiah and the Savior of the entire human race. I can not stress this enough; this is only prophesy because of what was yet to happen. We see the story as it has already unfolded, not how it actually did.

This is the same perspective of John in today's passage. He wrote to people already transformed by faith into Jesus' Church. He affirmed identities already in place and in effect. The faithful members were God's chosen children, Jesus' brothers and sisters and siblings with each other in Christ. He was building them to face the challenges of living faith within the pagan world around them. They were up to the task from the perspective of being children of God. They witnessed out of a solid identity that was based on faith in God and in Jesus.

This is a powerful style of exhortation; affirm, encourage good behavior that already exists and build upon an established Christian identity. Would that all preachers be adept at this. John's letter is a positive model to motivate witness to Jesus. Not only that, but he's slipped in that more is yet to come. They have hope in Christ's return even in the face of persecution and

death. He has effectively preached the good news of the gospel. Jesus has saved you. Jesus is saving you. Jesus will establish salvation in the Kingdom. You do not fear evil, sin, suffering or death; God has transformed us all.

There's a challenge for us, in these passages. The pandemic rages with no sign of abatement. Even though many of us wear our masks and are fully vaccinated the hold-outs ensure that more and possibly deadly viral variants will mutate beyond Delta and Omicron. Gunmen continue to mow down innocents. Political incompetents and liars still practice their craft. I remember the days when politics was defined as the art of the possible and not a line in the sand which no one would cross. Some still hold to the dream that one day we would not judge people by appearance or the color of their skin but the content of their character. It is my profound hope, that in faith and as God's children, we can overcome, in Christ, one day. I add, and soon. I don't want next year to be 2020 too.

May our hope be rooted in the love of Christ.

James D. Beath  
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