**Advent 3 A Gaudete Sunday Lectionary Catechesis**

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| Introducing John the Baptist, one of the central figures to Advent, the Church urges us to prepare and announce the Lord’s coming. The prophecies are not about the future, but the ways in which we read the signs of our own times and see how God visits His people. We do live in a parched and desert-like culture; the images of the first two readings contrast our world with agricultural images of abundance through patient waiting for God to act. God acts by sending us prophets to help us see God’s healing love everywhere in our world. Our response is to engage through repentance in God’s healing of our sins. |

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 35, 1-6a. 10**

The prophet Isaiah worked from about 742 to 701 BC during major political, economic, and religious threats to his culture and country. The powerful Assyrian Empire collapsed, Babylon was ascendant, and the northern kingdom of Israel conquered, leaving only the very small kingdom of Judah around Jerusalem. This particular passage comes after a long critique of Israel’s foreign policies and a judgment against the nations; Isaiah’s prophecies center around the hopes for a messianic king and a return to an Eden-like state. The passage opens with wilderness and parched land, a symbol of both physical destruction and a spiritual state of emptiness and despair; the passage ends with healing for the poor and afflicted and the inrushing of joy, gladness, and song. The prophecy is taken to refer to Jesus’ healing ministry when he came.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | What parts of our lives today are a “desert” and “a parched land”?  Why are humans feeble and frightened? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | Where do you see “the glory of the Lord”?  Do you bring joy and gladness into your family life and into the circle of your friends? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Share with your family or group where you see and hear the divine and holy presence of God?  Share a grace you’ve received from God. |
| **WORSHIP** | Name the Church’s opening chant for the Mass.  How does your singing make the Mass “rejoice with joyful song”? |

**First Reading**

**RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 146, 6-7. 8-9. 9-10**

“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. The Lord is good to all, compassionate to all your works.” (Vss. 8-9) We, who are sometimes less than gracious, merciless, swift to anger, are taken aback by these central verses. They make us think and challenge our own cultural notions of privilege. Too frequently, people have seized upon the notion that the Old Testament Father God is just the opposite. More problematic for us is the thought that God is good to all. Our definition of “all” can too often be far more narrow in inclusion than what “all” means in the reign of God.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | What is you predominant image of God from the Old Testament and why?  Why is God good to all? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | To what have you been faithful in your life?  Share a personal story when you secured justice for someone else or the environment. |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | What kind of social justice work do you volunteer for?  What do you think about the way Pope Francis shares his faith with the poor? |
| **WORSHIP** | How do you experience God’s faithfulness during the Mass?  What part of the Mass encourages us into the work of social justice and healing? |

**Responsorial Psalm**

**SECOND READING: James 5, 7-10**

Almost at the end of the letter of James, this passage comes just before his instructions for anointing the sick. The keyword here seems to be patient, as a verb, an action. A very literal translation of the Greek would be “make big your inmost thoughts.” We often think of patience as a kind of inaction. The first part is an ethical exhortation, and the second part introduces a solid theology for honoring the prophets (and many of our Christian saints have been prophets in our history until now) as saints. The women and men are models for our own lives in patience, endurance, and perseverance. The very middle verse applies to daily life just about anywhere: “Do not complain about one another that you may not be judged.” Sometimes the coming of Christmas requires much patience from us about family, travel, and shopping/

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | Sometimes the Bible tells us to “harden not our hearts” and here we are told to make our hearts firm.  What’s the difference? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | What would help you be patient in your life?  How does expanding one’s inmost thoughts create patience? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Consider someone in your world whom you have judged. This week, practice non-judgment.  Share the story of your favorite saint or prophet and tell why they are best for you. |
| **WORSHIP** | When you come to Mass, do you ever experience Christ as the “Judge at the gate? Why?  How does the Mass, or any praying for that matter, create patience in your life? |

**Second Reading**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 11, 2-11**

John the Baptist inquires through his disciples who Jesus is. Jesus’ response points to the fulfillment of the prophets. Then Jesus turns to the crowd, who came mostly to marvel at the miracles. Our media today disregards the teaching of Jesus by its mockery, but would have paparazzi lined up for blocks to be entertained by the miracles. We’d do anything to prepare for a visiting “celebrity”. Jesus’ rebuke that we should be preparing God’s way hits us hard.

**Vs. 5: CCC 549 and 2443** The Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed go straight from the mystery of the incarnation to the mystery of the passion and resurrection. Neither creed speaks of the private life or public ministry of Jesus, but the Catechism inserts paragraphs between these two parts of the Creeds about the ministerial life of life of Jesus. The Catechism teaches that Jesus came to free us from the

bondage of sin; while many illness and sufferings hold us back from the freedom of the children of God, sin is the worst and most overwhelming to us. **CCC 2443** states, “God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them.” Christmas preparation is a practice of generosity and penitence. John preached to the poor and poor in spirit.

**Vs. 6: CCC 548** The “signs” worked by Jesus encourage and invite our faith in him as the Son of God.

This text warns us about the distraction of the miracles of Jesus when they become merely the objects of circus curiosity and our fascination with magic. What the crowds come out to see in John the Baptist is just like that. This is why the Church is very slow to validate a miracle, a vision, or the life of a saint; most recently we received a letter cautioning us about the unapproved status of Medjugorie, for example. St Paul recommends we test “spirits”.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | What does it mean to say that “Jesus came to free us from the bondage of sin”?  Why are signs as miracles more attractive to us than the teachings of Jesus? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | What do you come to church to see, to hear, to experience this Christmas?  Describe your experience of meeting and hearing Jesus in this gospel story? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | In what way can you be a messenger who goes ahead of Jesus in your life?  Who do you expect Jesus to be for you? |
| **WORSHIP** | How are we born into the reign of God?  What part of the gospels show Jesus in the prophetic lineage? |

**Gospel**

**Next Sunday: Advent 4 A: Isaiah 7, 10-14; Ps 24; Romans 1, 1-7; Matthew 1, 18-24**