



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of December, 2011

by Terry A . Modica



2nd Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2011

Read:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Ps 85:9-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8



God has given you talents and a vocation – a calling, a special purpose – that requires those talents. Yes, you! We are all called to have fruitful lives that make an eternal difference. We are all called to be like Mary giving birth to Jesus so that the world becomes a better place.

Jesus wants to come straight to us to produce the fruits of his eternal kingdom in our lives and in others.

Reflect:

This Sunday's readings tell us to prepare for the Lord – for whatever he wants to give us, do for us, and ask of us. He has a plan for our lives, a divine purpose that will bring us to our full potential.

How do we know we are on the right path? By the fruits of the journey. The way of holiness always produces good fruits.

Isaiah says: A voice cries out in the desert! What is barren in your life, and dry, hot, or empty? Sins dry up what would otherwise be fruitful.

Advent is a good preparation for Christmas – and meeting the Lord anew – if we use it to face our sins, reconcile with God, and follow Jesus back onto the holy path. If we neglect this opportunity, Christmas will be only a secular holiday. Our lives will be too barren to give Jesus to others, and we will feel just as empty next year as we do right now.

Prepare the way of the Lord! He has more love to give you, more healing, more joy! Make straight in the wasteland of your sins a highway for our God. Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and create a wider road into your heart.

All humankind is as frail as grass that withers and wilts. What are your troubles and struggles this Advent? Here is where Jesus wants to minister to you, and here is where you are most vulnerable to sin.

What in your life is going well? What activities are you doing that seem good and productive? Are any of them grassy glories that can wither away in a drought? A hundred years from now, will what you're doing today still have an impact – a *beneficial* impact?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What will you do this week to straighten a crooked path?
- † What are you spending time on that is only going to wither up and wilt away?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † What good do you see in each other that will make an eternal difference?
- † How does thinking about eternity straighten the path that you're walking on today? What changes because of this perspective?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

3rd Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2011

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 that mean?

We know that Jesus is the Light of Truth that shines in the darkness to draw us to eternal life. And we know that his Spirit enlightens us in the truth so that we can be saved from our sinfulness 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. And his testimony brings us to the Light of Christ by challenging us with: "Where is your life and and dry? Christ is coming to meet you there! Make a bee-line to him! Repent, change, do whatever is necessary to find Jesus!"

We've all experienced times when Jesus seems unavailable. 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 first reading), to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to those who are held captive in their sins, and to announce how to be blessed by friendship with the Lord.

We all have the same calling as John had: We are all supposed to be voices crying out loud enough to be

heard above the din of the world. Many souls are lost in the wilderness of confusion, hopelessness, pain, heartache, and despair, not to mention sinfulness. Can we rightfully ignore their needs? Certainly not! Someday we will have to explain to Jesus why we

failed 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. How we handle trials, revealing our faith in Jesus, is a voice that's audible to those who are struggling.

The better we live the faith, the louder and clearer is our message.

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!

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

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† 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:

4th Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2011

Read:

2 Samuel 7:1-5,8b-12,14a,16

Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel shows us how the mission of Christ affected the Virgin Mary even before Jesus was conceived in her womb.

Three decades later, Jesus would become the Savior of the world. However, that is not when his salvation plan began. Jesus is God; he has always existed. He is the uncreated Divine Son, the Person of the Holy Trinity who, as we proclaim in the Nicene Creed, was "born of the Father before all ages, God from God...."

His salvation plan could – and did – impact Mary since the moment of her own conception.

In order for God to come into our world in the flesh, his Spirit totally bathed Mary in his pure, holy presence. Therefore, even though she could not understand how the promised Messiah could be conceived within her, since she'd had no sexual relations, by the grace of God's Spirit she could know that God was the one who was asking for it and God was the one who was doing it. That's all she needed.

All of us are called by God to carry the presence of Christ and birth him more fully into the world. What are you doing about it? How much are you fulfilling your divine destiny? Remember, he always empowers us to accomplish whatever he asks us to do. God knows what he's doing when he calls us to continue what Mary began, and he is always trustworthy and dependable. There is nothing to fear, no reason to hold back from fulfilling our true destiny.

With this in mind, when he asks us to do something for his kingdom, of course our answer is yes, right?

Why wouldn't it be? Of course we want to cooperate with his plan, and we say yes to his plan even when we don't understand it nor see how God could possibly do what he says he'll do.

Often, we don't feel like he can do what he's planning to do through us, because we know we are weak, sinful, and unqualified. Don't trust your feelings about it; trust God.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† When was the last time you said to God, "But how can this be? You want me to do *what*? I don't understand why!"

† What were you afraid of? How strong was your trust in God?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When God chooses you for a task or responsibility, what helps you move from uncertainty or confusion or reluctance into saying "yes"?

† When the plans of God don't make sense or they seem unpleasant, how do you overcome your reluctance?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Christmas

December 25, 2011

Readings:

Vigil of Christmas

Isaiah 62:1-5 / Ps 89:4-5,16-17,27,29

Acts 13:16-17,22-25 / Matthew 1:1-25

Mass at Midnight

Is 9:1-6 / Ps 96:1-3,11-13

Titus 2:11-14 / Luke 2:1-14

Mass at Dawn

Is 62:11-12 / Ps 97:1,6,11-12

Titus 3:4-7 / Luke 2:15-20

Mass During the Day

Is 52:7-10 / Ps 98:1-6

Hebrews 1:1-6 / John 1:1-18



Reflect:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bear good news, announcing the way of salvation and saying, "Your God is King!" That's how the scripture readings begin in Mass of Christmas Day.

Midnight Mass tells us that angels passed the good news of Christ's birth to nearby shepherds. In the Mass of Christmas Dawn, we see what the shepherds did after visiting the baby Jesus: They told others about him, and "all who heard were amazed."

Today you are hearing the good news. It's your turn to have the beautiful feet. The scriptures from Saturday's Vigil Mass start with "For Zion's sake I will not be silent ... until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch." And the responsorial Psalm has us declaring: "Forever I will sing of the goodness of the Lord."

Who do you know personally that's like Zion: someone who is suffering and needs vindication? Perhaps it is you yourself! We must first understand what Jesus has done for us and is doing for us. *Then* can we successfully help others understand.

What has amazed you about Jesus? Share that with those who need to be reassured that Jesus is amazing. Do you need that reassurance, too? Find to opportunities for connecting more closely to Jesus and his amazing love for you.

Here's the good news: Jesus was born not only to save you from the destructive power of sin; he was born because he loves you and wants to heal your heart-breaks and guide you into a life full of victories.

The amazing presence of Christ comes to us at every Mass in the Eucharist. Although the little wafer of bread does not look like it contains the full presence of Jesus with all of his love for you, it is the Christmas gift that he wants to give you all year long. He is *here* for you.

Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist and in the words read at Mass and the hymns and gathering of the people and the teachings of the Church because he *is* the good news, the way of salvation, the vindication we need and the goodness we long for. He is *here* for you!

Everyone longs for a savior, someone to rescue them and help them experience peace and healing and victory. The Eucharist unites us to Jesus so that we can receive him and share him. Now go out and spread that good news so that others can be amazed by Christ, too.

Questions for Reflection & Sharing:

- † What has amazed you about Jesus?
- † How do you share the Good News?

Comments/Prayer Requests: