

Sunday Message

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year B • 17 December 2023 • Psalter Week 3

SECOND FIDDLE

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

'You're so vain,' declares Carly Simon in her famous song of that title. She doesn't say who it's about, but were she singing it today, there would be no shortage of candidates. We live in the age of celebrity, of the selfie and the social media influencer.

The cult of celebrity is huge. Reality TV thrives on people's desperate desire to become famous. It has made celebrities of people we would never have heard of otherwise.

Some years ago the owner of the cosmetics company, L'Oreal died. Liliane Bettencourt was one of the richest people on earth, made rich in part by one of the most successful advertising campaigns ever launched. L'Oreal use celebrities to front their campaigns using the slogan we are all familiar with: "Because you're worth it." Use their product because you're worth it. Spoil yourself because you're worth it. You deserve the best because you're worth it.

It's no surprise the slogan has had such a big impact, because it's part of human nature to focus on ourselves, to think only or primarily about ourselves. In many ways, it's the dominant mindset of our modern culture. It's why so many people endure all kinds of trials on shows like 'I'm a celebrity...' in order to become more famous or resurrect flagging careers.

Taking part in 'I'm a celebrity...' wouldn't have bothered the star of today's Gospel, John the Baptist. John lived in the desert. He dressed in camel skin and survived on locusts and wild honey. Those maggots and creepy crawlies the so-called celebrities squirm over would have been a normal breakfast for him. He looked the type that even Conor McGregor would be loathe to encounter in a well-lit alleyway.

And yet, people flocked to him from all over. They were impressed by his message of repentance. They got baptised by him.

It must have been tempting for John to feel like a celebrity, a kind of messiah. All these people were coming from far and wide to see him, hear him, be baptised by him, this wild, desert prophet. The temptation to be vain, to think, 'It's all about me' must have been tremendous - but he resists. John is at pains to push the focus away from himself. He doesn't want to be the centre of attention. He knows he is only a messenger. He says, "Someone is coming after me who is greater than I am, and I'm not fit to undo the strap of his sandals." Here is his chance to become a celebrity, but John points away from himself, towards Jesus. He is saying, "It's not about me - it's about Jesus. Don't focus on me. Focus on Jesus." John knows he is of secondary importance and that Jesus, the one he witnesses to, is of primary importance.

So it must be with us also. As Christians, our focus must always be on Jesus. ■

REFLECT

Today's Gospel offers two challenges. The first is about humility. When you think about it, we have every reason to be humble. We did not bring ourselves into existence. Every 'good' we have is a gift, either directly from God, or indirectly by means of those who came before us. We cannot restore our youth (no matter how much botox or plastic surgery we use). We can't get rid of osteoporosis if it bites into us. We can't make ourselves or our lives look perfect. We cannot prevent our own deaths. We cannot raise ourselves from the dead

and give ourselves the gift of eternal life. We can't stop our loved ones dying.

Humility is recognising our smallness before God. We can only be humble and only form right relationships with others when we cease making all our actions revolve around ourselves.

Second, what John the Baptist is telling us, and what Advent tells us, is that, as Christians, our primary focus must be on Jesus. As Christians, it can never be all about me - it must be all about Jesus, following Jesus, pointing to Jesus. Yes,



DO

Think about how you witness to Jesus. Are you happy to let others know that you are his follower?

PRAY

For many people in financial distress, the lead up to Christmas is especially difficult. Pray for those who are finding it hard to hold onto hope this Advent.

SAY

"Lord, help me to be an effective witness to you. Amen."

LEARN

The Third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means "rejoice!" and since the Mass begins with the words of Saint Paul - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4) - this Sunday came to be known as Gaudete Sunday. On this Sunday the liturgical colour is rose, symbolising the anticipated joy of Christmas breaking into the more penitential Advent Season.

we must love ourselves as people made in God's image and likeness. Yes, we must have a healthy self-regard, and take proper care of ourselves and our loved ones, but self-obsession and self-fixation can never be part of it. Like the Baptist, everything we do must point towards Jesus. The kind of people we are, the lives we lead, the example we give, all must point towards Jesus.

That's our challenge this season and always. How effectively do you point others towards Jesus? For us Christians, it must be all about Jesus. Because he's worth it. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.

COLLECT

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. 'I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity, like a bridegroom wearing his wreath, like a bride adorned in her jewels. 'For as the earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will the Lord make both integrity and praise spring up in the sight of the nations.'
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

Response:

My soul rejoices in my God.

- 1 My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her nothingness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed. (R.)
- 2 The Almighty works marvels for me. Holy his name! His mercy is from age to age, on those who fear him. (R.)
- 3 He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty. He protects Israel, his servant, remembering his mercy. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians.
Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus.
Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything – hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil.
May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and he will not fail you.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 1:6-8, 19-28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then,' they asked 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.'

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear.

Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The liturgical season of Advent has a twofold character. We think of it first of all as a time to prepare for Christmas, when Christ's first coming among us in human form will be remembered. Second, it is the season that prepares our minds and hearts for Christ's second coming at the end of time. The main note of our Advent liturgy is therefore devout and joyful expectation.