



# Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent | December 17, 2017

## Proclaiming Our Joy

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**T**oday is **Gaudete** (GOW de tay) Sunday. The name comes from the Latin word that begins the introit (opening antiphon) of the day's liturgy. It means, simply, "rejoice." When I think about the many times I've rejoiced, I'm usually very moved. When I graduated college and graduate school, when my husband and I married, when our daughters were born, and when they married—all of these were periods of great rejoicing marked by parties, congratulations, and the sweet feeling that something wonderful had taken place and that our lives were richer for it.

### Sunday Readings

#### Isaiah 61:11–2a, 10–11

He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son.

#### John 1:6–8, 19–28

[Jesus said,] "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"

This third Sunday of Advent is our liturgical reminder that we have much to rejoice about. God didn't become incarnate just for the people who lived a long time ago. The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ for all of us living today and for all the generations to come. He came for sinners and saints and for those who haven't yet had an opportunity to know him.

Why do we rejoice? Because what Scripture said is true: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Something wonderful has taken place for everyone, and we join St. Paul, the prophet Isaiah, the psalmist, and John in proclaiming our joy. It's a good day to look up from what we're doing and rejoice at the great gift of faith we've been given, even while we continue our own prayer and preparation. +

*We rejoice because  
of the truth of the  
holy Scriptures.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

To celebrate Christmas in a fruitful manner, we are called to pause in "places" of astonishment....The first place is *the other*, in whom we recognize a brother or sister, because since the birth of Jesus occurred, every face is marked with a semblance to the Son of God. Above all when it is the face of the poor, because God entered the world poor, and it was to the poor, in the first place, that he allowed himself to draw near.

—Angelus,  
December 20, 2015



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What makes you joyful? Would those same things make Jesus joyful, too?
- Do I point people toward the true source of joy with my words and example?



# Home for the Holidays

By Alice Camille

I always get the creeps from Currier and Ives. It's not that I don't have my sentimental streak. I save old Christmas cards and the caps from champagne bottles. And my heart quivers at the sight of Rudolph being spurned by the other reindeer.

But I find myself in resistance mode about this time, when the Currier-and-Ives-style holiday seems jammed down my throat. Sleigh scenes and chubby Santas aside, not every Christmastime has been a memory of roaring fires, hot chocolate, and close-knit family. Some Christmases in my memory were three-alarm disasters that can awaken me in a cold sweat.

Paradoxically, part of the trouble with the holidays is that it's homecoming season. Traveling can be a bear, but it's not only navigating airports and highways in bad weather that bugs me. It's what I might have to navigate when I reach my destination that's the real worry.

My family is fairly well behaved. We have no serial killers or deviants, and much of the time we can be counted on to be normal about festive gatherings, their religious and cultural significance.

But we do have prodigal members, those who have gone certifiably astray by the usual markers and whose presence or absence at every holiday is an issue.

I don't know which I mind more: the years when a disruptive arrival leads to shouting and tears, or the times when a quiet boycott makes us retell the old stories about what went wrong and why someone is unwelcome. I anticipate those conflicts with dread.

## Universal Message

This story is common and probably why Jesus included a prodigal parable in his repertoire. A son turns out to be a disappointment to his father and a source of shame to his brother. The son who does everything wrong disappears for years. The son who plays it by the book remains at home, working in the family business. Then one day, guess who returns? And guess what the anxious parent and furious stay-at-home sibling do next?

The point of the parable—variously called the parable of the Prodigal Son or the story of the forgiving father—is aimed at neither the son who was lost, nor the father who finds it in his heart to embrace him again. It's the third party in this tale, the obedient brother, who receives the moral lesson. Jesus, remember, is addressing the Pharisees, who can be self-righteous about how obedient they are, like the older brother in the story. The parable affirms that sinners will sin and that God, who is

absolute mercy, will forgive. That much is unquestioned.

But how do average Christians react to this news? Does understanding God's mercy comfort or offend us?

## God's Justice

Most of us are not villains, but law-abiding people with a few peccadilloes. Our wrongdoing is minor and run-of-the-mill—the kind of thing easily swept under the rug of our conscience. And because we toe the line, we greatly appreciate it if others do, too. If they don't, we would prefer that they pay the consequences. But what if God lets them off scot-free? Where's the justice in that?

Divine compassion often offends our sense of justice. After all, people shouldn't be able to do anything they want! That's certainly true—but God's mercy doesn't imply that they can. Sin is still a bad idea that leads to heartache. But God chooses to respond to the wayward child with open arms and not a door slammed in the face. If we're part of this family, we'd better make room for that notion. +



Lord, you are the source of my strength, peace, and joy. Send your Spirit to renew my trust and hope in you and give me peace.

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 18-23

Mon. Advent Weekday:  
Jer 23:5-8 / Mt 1:18-25  
Tue. Advent Weekday:  
Jgs 13:2-7, 24-25a / Luke 1:5-25  
Wed. Advent Weekday:  
Is 7:10-14 / Lk 1:26-38

Thu. Advent Weekday:  
Sg 2:8-14 / Lk 1:39-45  
Fri. Advent Weekday:  
1 Sm 1:24-28 / 1 Lk 1:46-56  
Sat. Advent Weekday:  
Mal 3:1-4, 23-24 / Lk 1:57-66