

December 13, 2020 | 3rd Sunday of Advent (B)

[IS 61:1-2A, 10-11](#)

[LK 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54](#)

[1 THES 5:16-24](#)

[JN 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

By Thad Crouch

Advent is a time of longing, of penitence, and joyful hope. The Jewish people in Jesus's earthly time were longing for a military messiah who would free them from foreign oppression and return them to an old norm. They idealized the time of King David. They wanted to make Israel and Judah "great again" just as many white Americans might idealize the 1950s.

"Jesus Christ" — which means "Jesus is the Messiah" — brings us freedom from internal and external oppressions far beyond military capabilities. Armies can't conquer poverty and racism. Marine sharpshooters can't stop COVID contagion with bullets. Air forces can stop heat waves that burn homes. Coast guards can't stop invading hurricanes, and navy submarines lack the depth to heal ideological divides. No space forces can free the spaces in our hearts and minds from the oppression of worrisome reactionary living at the effect of all those circumstances. Christ can.

If a messianic army had defeated Rome, the Jewish people would still have had their own sinful internal obstacles to freedom and outward domestic oppressions that made some people outcasts. Even without Rome, an elite priestly class lived in luxury by using temple troops to shake impoverished people down for taxes. The old norm was not so great. Neither was the 1950's for people of color in the U.S. The 50s were also a decade when our nation overthrew democracy in Guatemala for a fruit company and Iran for oil. Our intelligence worked with former Nazi war criminals to interfere with European democracies. If we do not avail ourselves of grace to overcome sinful obstacles to internal freedom, we can be blind to social obstacles to justice. Guadate Sunday focuses on the joy Christ's coming even with 2020's pandemic, economic hardships, fires, hurricanes, and very divisive polarizing political system. Our joy in Christ is not contingent on circumstances that can trigger us into states of worry, fear, despair, or animosity. We can "Rejoice always," "pray without ceasing," and "in all circumstances give thanks."

Such consistent spiritual practices can free us to experience peace, confidence, joy, and love. Fr. Henri Nouwen described joy as "the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing — sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away." Such faithful joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that frees us from fears that can hold us back from being who we are created, redeemed, called, and sanctified to be. God's mercy frees us not only from death to eternal life, God also frees us NOW from our internal self-inflicted oppression of past sins, past pains, and reacting to circumstances.

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil." In our prayer God's love transforms us to better love

others. The prophets prioritized doing justice for the poor and trusting God Israel above alliances with earthly might. We test what is good so that we can refrain from the evil of ideologies that harm life, dignity, and the common good. While the liberalism of individual freedoms and human rights has brought much good fruit, Pope John XXII told us that rights come with responsibilities. Many of our injustices and social problems such as racism, poverty, pollution, abortion, injustice, and war come from putting the profit or convenience of either individuals or businesses above the common good in ways that damage dignity, kill human life, and harm the ecological balance of creation that sustains life itself. Faithful citizenship requires us to engage politics to protect life, promote justice, and care for creation. We prioritize “Jesus I trust in you” over trust in Biden, Trump, political parties or military might.

Voting is never over for faithful citizens. The early Latin word for “vote” meant to vow, wish, pledge, promise a god, or dedicate. We vote with our constant prayer and gratitude to God. That voting liberates our hearts to accept the coming of Christ in our neighbors, the poor, the oppressed, the unborn, the immigrant, and even with those who go along with oppression and our enemies! From such joyful hearts we can vote with daily spiritual and corporate works of mercy, community organizing, and political advocacy in any year. Our souls can proclaim the greatness of the Lord in a world that looks for greatness in all the wrong places.

Thad Crouch hosts [Choose Life Abort War Podcast for Peace](#), coordinates this [Linking the Lectionary to Justice and Peace Project](#) for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, and serves on both the Social Justice Committee and Respect Life Ministry team at St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church in Austin, Texas.