



Bringing Home the Word



Third Sunday of Advent December 11, 2016

A Garden Well-Tended

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I'm not much of a gardener. When our family was young, we planted vegetables to connect our children with the miracle of growing things. But the truth is, I kill houseplants regularly, and the clay soil in our back yard made growing things a little harder than I was willing to tolerate. So I spent my time tending to children and other pursuits.

When I look at the wonderful young women my children have become, I don't regret any of it—they're evidence of a garden well-tended. We all have gardens we cultivate in the soil we work and in the lives we lead.

In today's readings, Isaiah and Jesus point to gardens of a different sort. Isaiah imagines God as the great gardener who brings flowers and trees out of arid sand and clay soil and then moves on to bring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. What a glorious image of a promise made—where we all grow and are made whole.

Jesus doesn't answer John's disciples. He simply points them in the direction of the garden of Good News he's tended. He sends them to John with tales of what they've seen and heard in all its abundance because John will know a garden when he hears about it and will rejoice in its growth.

Finally, James, laboring in the Lord's garden decades after the Lord's death, reminds us of the truth every farmer, landscaper, and household gardener knows so well: Making things grow—crops, flowers, faith, or people—takes patience.

What's growing in your garden this Advent? †

*"Jesus points John's
disciples in the direction
of the garden
of Good News."*

A Word From Pope Francis

The Church exists to proclaim her Bridegroom...to proclaim this word even to martyrdom....When we contemplate the life of [John the Baptist], so great, so powerful—everyone believed he was the Messiah—when we think of how this life was annihilated, his last days spent in a dark prison, we discover a mystery. We are offered [a model of] a Church ever at the service of the Word.

—Morning meditation,
"The example of John,"
June 24, 2013



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God, he comes
with vindication."

James 5:7–10

"Make your hearts firm,
because the coming of
the Lord is at hand."

Matthew 11:2–11

"Are you the one who is to come,
or should we look for another?"

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
ONE? TWO?
REFLECTION

- What attitudes are you hoping to grow in your life this Advent?
- What miracles of growth has Jesus provided in your life?



Defining Christmas Without Words

It's December and almost Christmas. It's also time to hear about the usual "War on Christmas." You probably have heard about this so-called war. Certain writers, commentators, and politicians assert that corporate America and the government are waging a war to remove "Christ" from Christmas. The story goes that only they—those writers, commentators, and politicians—are paying attention or doing something about it.

This war plays out at retailers, where

greeters share the sentiment "Happy holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." It's fought in corporate offices, where companies erect "holiday" trees. It's waged at government centers, where officials position Jewish symbols next to Nativity scenes. It takes place in public schools, where "holiday" instead of "Christmas" breaks take place.

This controversy is a distraction. For some of us, it becomes a subject of confrontation. We utter "Merry Christmas" as if daring someone to

challenge us on the matter. When we enlist in this war, we, unintentionally, veer sharply from the true meaning of Christmas. The battle over words obscures what marks a true Christian—Christian acts.

Isn't it more authentically Christian to visit a nursing home, serve in a homeless shelter, or help out a stranger than to say "Merry Christmas" through gritted teeth? It's fine to ask retailers and other institutions to use the word *Christmas*. But let's not make such a quest our main focus. As Catholics, it's our Christian duty to explain and, more importantly, share our faith. So let's not rely on stores or public schools or governments to evangelize. That's up to us. †

Source: "From the Publisher," *Liguorian*, December 2015

Prepare Ye the Way

By James S. Torrens, SJ

John the Baptist was the last of the great servants preparing God's way. With his rough austerity, he had learned to live wholly off of God. The sight of him subsisting on God and the sound of him calling for a change of life drew the city people of Israel to him in great numbers. He did not flinch from blunt speaking to soldiers, to tax collectors, to the whole "brood of vipers" taking advantage of others.

John was preaching the old evangelical message, "Repent." He still has successors in parks and public squares, endowed

with megaphone voices. His great concern was the forgiveness of sins. The watery immersion he practiced was a prayer full of desire to be cleansed by God. In the presence of the Baptist's leading us into Advent today, enough of the old excuse for our weaknesses: "Sorry, I can't help it. That's just how I am." Enough of just going through the motions. John, as the new Elijah paving the way for the anointed of God, won't let us off the hook. He looks for an energetic response, repentance from whatever is slowing us down in God's service. †

Source: *Daybreaks*, © 2011 Liguori Publications

PRAYER

Lord, you are patient with me and give me time to correct my faults and become a better person. Help me to be more patient and loving toward others.

—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 12–17

- Mon. Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zec 2:14–17 or Rev 11:19a; 12:1–6a, 10ab / Lk 1:26–38 or Lk 1:39–47
- Tue. St. Lucy: Zep 3:1–2, 9–13 / Mt 21:28–32
- Wed. St. John of the Cross: Is 45:6b–8, 18, 21b–25 / Lk 7:18b–23

- Thu. Advent Weekday: Is 54:1–10 / Lk 7:24–30
- Fri. Advent Weekday: Is 56:1–3a, 6–8 / Jn 5:33–36
- Sat. Advent Weekday: Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17