

I will never stop thanking God!

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

1Thess 5:16-24

John 1:6-8,19-28

Isaiah is anointed with the Spirit of the Lord our God. He brings glad tidings to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted and liberty to the captives. He rejoices because he is wrapped in the Lord's justice and clothed with salvation. Justice and praise will spring up just as plants do in a fertile garden.

The Luke 1 passage echoes Mary's words of the Magnificat. The Almighty does great things, his name is holy, he is merciful, and does not forget his promises. Her soul proclaims the Lord's greatness, is blessed, and her spirit rejoices. The hungry will be filled with good things while the rich with their usual overabundance will be sent away empty. The faithful are remembered with the Lord's promise of mercy.

Paul's advice is to rejoice always and in all circumstances give thanks. All are encouraged to pray without ceasing and never to quench the Spirit. Everything is to be tested so that the good can be retained and the evil discarded. Paul prays that the God of Peace makes the faithful perfectly holy and that their blamelessness will be preserved in spirit, soul, and body for the Lord's coming.

John the Baptist was sent from God and testifies to the coming of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. He is the voice crying out to "make straight the way of the Lord." John tells the religious leaders, sent to question him that he is not the Christ; that he baptizes with water but there is one among them, who they do not recognize and he will bring a new kind of baptism.

The Almighty Father sent
The Son to baptize with fire and The Holy Spirit.

Today's readings remind us to turn our good intentions into action. How often have we wanted to do something to improve our prayer life but left it for tomorrow. Laudable intentions that are not carried out are not helpful to our spiritual life. When John the Baptist says, "Make straight the way of the Lord," he means NOW. The Lord's way to the heart is made straight when we humbly listen to the words of Truth, when we order our lives in accordance to the Spirit's guidance. It's not too early to give thought to your New Year's resolutions and how to follow through with action. The God of Peace will strengthen you and preserve you so that you will be blameless for the coming of the Lord.

John the Baptist differed in perspective from the religious leaders of the time as to what constituted a genuine religious person, the kind of person that would be able to eventually face God, and it was this difference that caused them to have little to do with his new movement. However, it had powerful appeal to the "rank and file," those who had not been considered religious.

To John being religious meant having a kind and honest heart, being the type of person that can be counted on at any time. It meant sharing with the needy; it meant giving a square deal in business; it meant being an honorable soldier and treating civilians justly. Too many of the leaders exhibited self-satisfied pride and in their social standing looked down upon the less fortunate. As a result they took as insult the searching questions of God's judgment that John posed to all who listened.

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