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“The one who calls you is faithful and will also accomplish it” (1 Thess 5:24).

### **Third Sunday of Advent**

*Isa 61:1-2a, 10-11; Luke 1:46-50, 53-54; 1 Thess 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28*

Gandhi trusted the way of nonviolence because he believed it was more effective than violence to bring about change. Facing short term defeat, he famously said, “When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it, always.”

Jesus, whose teachings inspired Gandhi, endured rejection and apparent defeat on the cross because he also believed that God was just and would not abandon the victims of injustice to their oppressors. He inaugurated his ministry with the words of Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted.” For the poor and brokenhearted of history, glad tidings could only mean the vindication of justice.

The promise of vindication is a side of Christmas that has been softened and submerged in themes of peace and love, but it appears in the Canticle of Mary when she rejoiced with Elizabeth and all the women of history who have been the first victims of violence and oppression, that God was keeping his promise to lift them up by pulling the powerful from their thrones, feeding the hungry and sending the rich away empty.

We do not often see the *Magnificat* in the Lectionary, nor do we highlight the terrors of the first Christmas, the slaughter of the innocents and the flight of the child into exile. Jesus entered a world hostile to God's purposes ruled by tyrants and murderers. The Gospel was first cast as a light that exposed the deeds done in darkness. John the Baptist kindled a torch he then passed to Jesus, who then passes it to us.

This year's Gaudete Sunday has arrived with remarkable timing and in dramatic context. We celebrate it just as hope is announced that a deadly virus now has an antidote. The nation has faced an unprecedented test of its basic institutions while waiting for truth and the rule of law to be reasserted. A more perfect union will require a long healing process and a shared commitment to the common good. Unity needs a strong foundation of justice and good will.

Has reality intruded on our holiday or has Christmas been at last revealed as the story of our survival? There is one among you whom you do not recognize, poor and brokenhearted, captive and oppressed, a child in a refugee camp, a displaced person, a prisoner, an outcast, the least and last of all. If we welcome them, we will be welcoming the one sent to save us.

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