



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Third Sunday of Advent, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

While the first two Sundays of the Advent season draw our attention to the eschatological coming of the Lord, the third Sunday focuses our attention much more on the Lord already present among us. In the old Latin liturgy, today was known as Gaudete ("Rejoice!") Sunday, and rose vestments were worn to signal an alleviation in the penitential character of the season. The Mass formularies today still retain the call to "rejoice," and the source and cause of that rejoicing is clearly the presence of God in our midst.



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Discerning the presence of God among us is tricky business, as the gospels show. Today's reading from John introduces a number of themes that will be important throughout his gospel. The Jewish authorities come to John to discern whether or not he is the Messiah. They hear from John his "testimony" about himself and about the "one who is coming after me" (v. 27), but there is no indication as yet that they accept John's witness. John, on the other hand, is an example of one who discerns accurately the nature of God's action in his life. He admits that he is not the Messiah, yet he also insists on the reality and importance of the role he plays in God's plan as the precursor to the Messiah. John points to the one in their midst whom they do not recognize. The author of the gospel says that John came "as a witness to testify to the light" (v. 7). In the world of John's gospel, authentic testimony requires that one dwell in the light and in the truth. Both are prerequisites for true discernment.

The first reading today has been called by some scholars the fifth servant song, so closely does it resemble the other four found in Deutero-Isaiah (chaps. 40-55). Yet its position in Trito-Isaiah (chaps. 56-66) suggest that its origin is different. The author acknowledges that his vocation is to bring to those who have returned from the Exile a message of healing and hope. In the midst of the desolation and destruction that the people found upon their return to Jerusalem, the prophet announces "good news" (v. 1) to the poor and a year of jubilee. Discernment, in the case of the author, means being able to recognize the importance of his own role in God's salvific plan, as well as how that plan will unfold in the lives of his contemporaries. In the dark days immediately following the return from exile, the prophet rejoices over the light which he sees dawning just over the horizon. Similarly, in a world poised to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, the Church discerns the dawning light of him who will scatter the darkness of sin.

### **Catholic Doctrine**

#### ***Discernment***

The word "discernment" in English derives from the Latin term *discernere*, meaning "to sever," "to separate," and "to distinguish." As used by believers, it carries with it a sense of sifting through the stuff of one's life in order to respond to the direction that God's grace holds out to us. More precisely, one contemporary author describes discernment as "separating out various feelings, beliefs, values, and inner voices in order to listen for and to the voice of the Spirit of God. Spiritual writings refer to it as a discernment of spirits, which is also a gift of the Spirit recognized in the early church" (Donna Steffen, S.C., *Discerning Disciples*, p. 14).

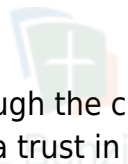


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We believe that God does not cast us adrift. The whole purpose of God's self-revelation in Jesus is to save us from sin and death, and therefore to provide for us a healthy and graced direction in this life that leads us to union with him in the next. Jesus promised us the Paraclete (or Advocate), the Holy Spirit, to assist us, console us, and guide us. The Spirit, ever at work in creation, formerly having spoken through the prophets, now is bestowed upon disciples of Christ (John 14:17) to gently lead us into the truth (CCC 243). As Jesus makes his farewell discourse to the Twelve he assures them that they will not be left as orphans in the world. This promised guidance by the Holy Spirit is the basis for the Christian notion of discernment.

Our life as disciples is made possible through baptism, the effect of which is to incorporate us into Christ. Through this sacrament we become dead to sin but alive for God in Christ, joined to the mystery of the Risen Lord. Baptism sets us on the course to follow Christ. Through the saving waters we are commissioned to imitate the Lord in the circumstances of our lives (CCC 1694).



How does the believer actually move through the circumstances of life and engage in discernment? First, discernment requires a trust in God that divine grace is given to us at every turn in order to help us move ever closer to the Lord. Second, discernment requires a corresponding trust in the Church, that through an active religious practice, such as reception of the sacraments, meditation on sacred Scripture, the cultivation of a prayer life, and examination of one's conscience, the believer's mind and heart are properly formed. Third, discernment requires the development of a discriminating attitude, a posture of "listening" to the voice of the Spirit in the events of our lives. This type of "listening" can be done in an inner dialogue. But our Catholic tradition also emphasizes the importance of finding a competent guide, another person with whom this conversation would take place. Fourth, discernment requires constant practice and fine-tuning as the events and stages of life move forward—as does our own Christian maturity. Finally, discernment requires humility. The Holy Spirit brings us into communion with Christ. And the first to accept communion with the Lord were the most humble (CCC 725). When the Messiah was born of Mary and brought into this world he was initially recognized by those who could not get any other job (shepherds), foreign travelers (the magi), the elderly and the poor (Simeon and Anna), and simple fishermen (the first disciples).