

During the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, a popular television show was "Mission Impossible." Each episode began with a secret agent (whose name just happened to be James) retrieving and listening to a cassette tape-recorder (how dated is that!!) that had been discreetly hidden someplace. A voice would say, "Good morning, Jim. Your mission, should you choose to accept it..." and then the "mission" would be spelled out. The recording always ended, "This message will self-destruct in fifteen seconds." Jim either "got it" or didn't "get it." No do overs here!!!

Mission pervades today's readings. The Hebrew scripture writer writing in the person and name of the prophet Isaiah, known today as "Third Isaiah", John the Baptist who we encounter again today, and St. Paul each are "agents" sent on mission by God.

In the first reading Isaiah's mission is to his recently returned fellow countrymen from seventy years of exile in Babylon. Feeling defeated and returning to a ruined country and a destroyed Temple, Isaiah's message proclaims God's salvation as one of healing the brokenhearted, liberty to captives, release to prisoners. God is renewing his covenant of love and salvation with the people he has chosen as his own metaphorically described as a bride and groom arrayed in their wedding finery, and a lush verdant garden.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist quoting Isaiah directs attention away from himself and points to the one who will follow him fulfilling the prophet's vision in the first reading. John humbly acknowledges that his mission is one of "preparing the way of the Lord" who is the true Word of God, the true Light who is coming into the world.

St. Paul urges his readers to "rejoice always" in the face of the ordinariness, the trials and struggles of life. He reminds them not to forget they already possess the gift of divine life promised through the prophets through their faith and baptism into Jesus.

Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Paul's mission is the mission of the Church today. Who of us at times in our faith journey in the face of our personal struggles, sins, and the trials of life in the world finds themselves brokenhearted, due to a diagnosis of a serious or even life-

threatening illness; a marriage and/or family relationship which is experiencing serious problems or has ended in divorce; captive physically due to illness or the debilitations that come with age; prisoner to an addiction such as alcohol, or other chemical or internet pornography? And the list could go on. As for the people to whom Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Paul were missioned, we, too are consoled as we are called to look to God—a God who is not disinterested in our sufferings, our longings, a God who comes again through the Spirit in Jesus to take upon himself the “sin of the world” to enter into our sufferings, and dying, defeats them, gaining for us the fullness of divine life forfeited through our original sin. The mission of Isaiah, John the Baptist, and St. Paul is to point us to “Emmanuel”—God who is with us.

Advent and the upcoming Christmas celebration constitute our “mission” as God’s “agents” today. Like Isaiah, John the Baptist, and St. Paul, we who have received, and receive anew, God’s saving grace are commissioned as Gospel Agents. Ours is the mission of proclaiming healing to the brokenhearted, recovery of sight to the blind, release to prisoners, to proclaim the time of God’s favor. “Do not quench the Spirit” St. Paul urges us. The mission is carried out in many ways. As the Archbishop urged us a month ago, “Do something!” Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, **The Joy of the Gospel**, calls for each of us to open ourselves anew to the person and message of Jesus, to mission in carrying the message of the gospel into our world. He writes: *“The Joy Of The Gospel fills the hearts and life of all who encounter Jesus. I encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization. I invite all Christians...to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask you to do this unfailingly each day. ...In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.”*

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, Impossible? No. As the angel said to Mary, “With God, all things are possible.” With her we reply, “Let it be done to me as you say.”

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