

Third Sunday of Advent, A – December 14, 2025 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 650 words

There is no doubt that we are living in a difficult period of history, and that if we watch too much of the news or consume too much media in general, we can get rather depressed. God has chosen us for this time and not some golden age, though, so we find the way through it all. And on Sundays like this we are challenged even to rejoice in the midst of so many trials. How can this be possible? Well, having some healthy knowledge of history can help us through our portion of it, for sure.

Think of the great Saint Augustine. He died as the city of Hippo, where he was bishop – and not just any bishop, but one who was very engaged with his people –, was being surrounded by a barbarian tribe called the Vandals. Think of the sense of hopelessness he must have felt as the city was sacked and it seemed like the twilight of Western Civilization. Yet it was not the end: he not only died a great saint and has done such good from heaven, but Western Civilization somehow has survived.

Fast-forward some 1,600 years and let's find ourselves beside Saint Maximilian Kolbe, offering his life in place of another in the German concentration camp. Maybe the other man would live – but for what? It must have seemed like the Nazi forces would win, that they would succeed in extinguishing entire races, and that their power would keep growing. But he died a great saint and has done such good from heaven, and the Nazi regime was soon after defeated. It was not truly the end.

But let's look at the prophet Isaiah in the first reading. The Jewish people of his time lived in great fear, for the Assyrians the north, also a very barbaric group, had decimated the Northern Kingdom and greatly reduced the tribe of Judah. Were the survivors not long for this world? Would God's chosen people be annihilated entirely? But Isaiah prophesied a great renewal. "Be strong, fear not!", he said, "Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense... to save you."

And then what about Saint John the Baptist in today's gospel? He clearly knew who Christ was – he had been the first to point him out to the crowds. But it seems John may have experienced a final trial of faith – a "dark night of the soul", before he was finally perfected in holiness. There he was, dying in prison. Had he got everything wrong? Was he a failure? Jesus not only reassures him, but praises him as the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets; and now he, too, is a great saint.

Thus, Saint James exhorted us in the second reading, "Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.... Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.... Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Things may often seem bleak, but history teaches us that God has the final say. It is for us, then, to turn to him always, rejoice in him and his strength, and beg him to keep us firm in faith.

In the entrance antiphon for Mass, we heard the verse from Saint Paul in his letter to the Philippians that has lent the name of "Gaudete" to this Sunday: "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." The nearness of Jesus to us, even in the midst of our trials – even during those low points and challenging seasons – is what makes it possible for us to rejoice always. As the saying goes, history is "his story"; though we may have to pass through many difficult trials, we rejoice, because he will bring us to a most blessed end.