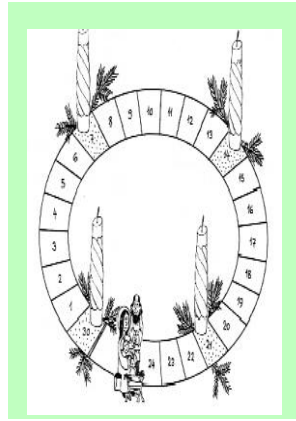




St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

Today's Prayer

The more we call on
God
the more we can feel
God's presence.
Day by day we are
drawn closer
to the loving heart of
God.



December 14th and 15th 2013

The Third Sunday of
Advent - Year A

St. Thomas Church

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THE THIRD ADVENTSUNDAY-A

Today is *Gaudete Sunday* which in Latin means the "Sunday of Rejoicing." To express this note of hope and exultation, the priest even wears rose colored vestments as an exception to the usual somber violet. For, within two weeks we will be celebrating the solemnity of the birth of Jesus Christ. After four weeks of meditating on the "last days" we now turn our meditative attention to Christmas, the historic "first coming" of the Lord among us some two thousand years ago. The readings from Isaiah and James speak for themselves. The first from Isaiah, the prophet, writing some 700 years before Christ, announces *what* God will effect for his people; James gives some implicit instructions as to *how* we are to receive the Lord. The gospel of Matthew, as it were, fulfills and reveals what these two readings preach through a request made by John, now a prisoner of political circumstance. With his execution close at hand, this last Old Testament prophet anxiously desires to ascertain Jesus' credentials. Indirectly answering *via* a messianic paraphrase of Isaiah,

Jesus answers John's inquiring disciples with one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament: everything that God had promised his awaiting people is *now* being fulfilled. The gospel closes with a beautiful *eulogy*- as it were- of John's ascetical life and powerful ministry: *History has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptizer.*

As we prepare for Christmas accompanied by those commercial traps and mindless distractions, try each day to reflect on the question John once asked: *Who are you?* The answer can be tossed over by rote memory but more importantly does it lead us into the presence of Jesus? *Blessed are those who seek for they shall find.*

The First Reading

Although rooted in first Isaiah, these passages rang true beyond their historical underpinnings. The verses portray eschatological hope, yet assume a dire situation. Notice the contrasts. The barren wilderness would rejoice in springtime bloom. The beauty of natural wonders would be given to the most desolate environs. God would reveal himself in lowest places. And these areas would respond in worship. [35:1-2]

Like the wilderness, the poor and weak would feel the saving touch of God. Those beaten down would be strengthened with a new courage. The ill would be healed. The blind would see. [35:3-6a]

Both the place and the people seem to be in ruin. Yet God would return their glory. In the mind of Isaiah and his contemporaries, this glory would signal a return to past heights for the monarchy. For Jesus' peers, the glory would look ahead to the end of days.

No matter whether we look back or forward for the "ideal" time, let us remember Isaiah spoke of God's initiative, not our own. God's initiative found its zenith in the birth of Jesus. Like Isaiah's audience (or Matthew's), we, too, look forward to the time God visits his people.

Coffee, Cookies & Conversation follow Sunday Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.** Please contact, Fr. William Faix if you want to add announcements to the bulletin at "wfaix@yahoo.com" or contact Fr. Juan at juan@augustiniani.cz. Please send at latest by the Friday of the week as it has to be added to the bulletin

Ongoing Activities

- If you would like to receive a **copy of the bulletin by email**, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz
- Please note: new of Fr. William's email: wsfaix@augustiniani.cz
- We are looking for an **English teacher** to teach in our school (kindergarten). Please contact Fr. Juan (juan@augustiniani.cz or 602684538) for details

Our CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE OF MASSES:

December 24: Christmas Eve,

18:00/06:00 – Mass for Families and Children

11:30pm/23:30- Christmas carols sung in Czech and English followed by the traditional Midnight Liturgy.

December 25 CHRISTMAS DAY, THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,

11:00 – Mass.

December 28,

18:00/06:00 – Mass

December 29, the feast of Holy Family

09:30 Deacon ordination of Fr. Jozef Ržonca, OSA

11:00 – Mass.

December 31,

18:00/06:00 – Mass to thanks for the year 2010

January 1,

Mass at 11:00 am

Restitution of Church properties (II)

What the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic is going to do with the properties and the money from the restitution?

The Church is taken care of many different social, cultural and educational activities. This money is helping to maintain this activities and also to pay the Priest and all the administration of the Church in each diocese

Also the Church knows that after 30 years will not receive any money from the state and then must be able to take care of all the activities without state help.

The Second Reading

The book of James is one of the more misunderstood books of the Bible. Many believe James faced off against Paul in the "faith vs. works" controversy. However, a closer inspection of each author reveals shades of meaning and emphasis. Paul chose faith in Christ over the duties (i.e., the "works") of the Law; in this sense, Paul believed Christianity provided a means for salvation that mere observance of the Law could not achieve. More bluntly, Paul held one could not "earn" his or her way into heaven. Salvation required a personal relationship with Christ. In his writings, Paul seemed to address not only his audience, but also his Jewish critics. James, however, was not concerned with Jewish foes or Jewish-Christians that insisted on strict adherence to the Law. James seemed to focus on the cohesion of the community itself. For James, faith was more a matter of professing creed than a dynamic trust relationship with the Lord. For James, works were acts of charity that brought the community together. Notice how James wove his definition of faith and works together in these few verses. The doctrine of the Lord's return still held great currency among those in his audience. Here, James counseled patience, even using an agricultural analogy. As the community waited, however, how should they act? Implicit in the critic of James lie the realization that the community's unity around an anticipation of the Second Coming was wearing thin. Many members of the community began to take their vision from the coming of the Lord; these were now gossips, back-biters, and rumor mongers. Cohesion in the community was breaking down. While James may have counseled patience, he also reminded his audience (especially critics within the community) that they could not rest easy. Any act that tore at the unity of the assembly would come before Christ at the end of time for judgement. Times may be tough, James seemed to say, but that was no reason to be tough on others. Instead, the doctrine of the Second Coming should be a reason for community building and unity of believers. James was famous for saying "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17). Indeed, we should be patient for the coming of the Lord, but patience does not mean distraction. A distracted faith is a dead faith, for it does not lead to action. As we wait for the coming of the Lord at Christmas, let us keep in mind that HE IS COMING, but in his own time and his own way. We need both patience and focus to truly prepare for his arrival.