Thoughts on the Readings of December 13, 2020

The Common Thread  Like children, we do not dress ourselves. God causes righteousness, as he clothes us with both righteousness and salvation. He has restored our fortunes and caused great joy, bringing us home from the far land of sin and death. No wonder we are to pray without ceasing, always giving thanks. He is coming again; the way has been prepared. And God will cause us to be blameless in every way at his return. He will surely do it, for he is faithful.

First Reading - Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11  The term “poor” in verse one, means more than may be understood at first glance. Luther wrote: “Christ is the person sent by God and filled with the Holy Spirit to be the Preacher and Evangelist to the poor, that is, the afflicted” (Works, vol 17, p 330). The vocation of the Christ is toward all the afflictions of the afflicted—from lack of necessities, to happiness, to freedom. His ministry is not only to those who are physically poor, but of course, for those who are spiritually poor (Matt 5:3). Yet, the Church needs to face the reverse statement. The ministry of Christ and his Church is not only for those who are spiritually poor, but also for those who are physically poor.

Psalm - Psalm 126:1-6  It does have a dreamlike quality. God has restored us to what he intended for us in creation. We are no longer captive to sin and death. Who could have imagined such a thing? The captives in Babylon spent generations removed from their homeland. They may have hoped for a while, but eventually hope is forgotten. The human race has spent a much longer time in captivity to sin—so long that most forget the penalty. When all hope was forgotten and we had forgotten our desperate condition, the Lord did great things for us. He has restored our ancient fortunes.

Second Reading - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24  When we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we sometimes wonder what it actually is so that we may do his will. Verses 16-18 tell us. As we await the great day of Christ’s coming, let us rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. That is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. The Christian who lacks joy, prayer, and thanksgiving throws water on the Holy Spirit’s (often represented as fire) work of
sanctification.
God’s will for us is sanctification. He begins this work in us through the
prescription of verses 16-18 but we should also pay attention to the next four
verses by fanning into flame the gifts within us, testing everything (Acts 17:11),
and adhering to what is good. These are agencies God uses to sanctify the whole
person—body, mind, and spirit. Through these things we remain focused in faith
so that he preserves us blameless at his appearing. Where you fail, God will
perform his will.

**Gospel - John 1:6-8, 19-28** The people wanted to know about John. Note
however, that John wanted the people to know about the Christ. John was just a
man, sent by God to bear witness about another, the light of the world (John
8:12). He did so by crying out in the wilderness. This location is purposeful to his
mission. John’s message was that the light from God, the Messiah, would lead
people out of their sin. No longer will they wander aimlessly in a wilderness of sin.
The Christ who John pointed to would lead them straight out of this wilderness.