DECEMBER 14 2025 DEACON MIKE WALSH

Let’s begin with a story.

As many stories begin, it begins this way, it says:
"There once was a young woman, from a very small town."

No one really knew her story, only that something inside her was broken. She lived in torment, restless and afraid, haunted by voices that would not let her rest. The only thing we know about her is that people thought that she was possessed by demons.

And then one day, a man looked at her. Not with judgement or fear, but with mercy. Something in her changed. The shadows lost their power, and the darkness lifted. From that moment on, she followed him. Faithfully, and quietly, even when others turned away.

She saw him heal the sick, feed the hungry, lift up the poor. And she also saw him suffer. She saw him betrayed and beaten. And she was there when he died.

When he was gone, she carried her sorrow to the tomb, holding the spices that she would use to anoint his lifeless body. Her heart was heavy with grief. And then, in the stillness, she heard her name: "Mary." In that instance, despair became joy, and death gave way to life.

Now you probably already guessed it, haven’t you, by now, that the young woman in our story is Mary of Magdala, the first witness of the resurrection. The one who discovered that even in the desert of pain, God can make joy blossom again.

Mary of Magdala is a wonderful companion for us this Advent. She was a woman who waited. Waited for healing, for peace, and for the one who

could set her free and could set her heart free. Her encounter with Christ transformed her completely.

On this Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of joy, where we light our rose candle, Mary from Magdala stands before us, as a witness of the promise of Advent. That even through trial and waiting, God's joy will come.

Today we continue our Advent journey with our first reading, from Isaiah 35, where the desert itself begins to bloom. We hear these words from the prophet in our first reading:
"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom."

Isaiah proclaims that renewal begins not in comfort, but in desolation. It is in times of suffering that the prophet calls out to us, saying:
"Be strong. Do not fear. Here is your God."

You know, when we immerse ourselves in our ancient story, we see, time and time again, that God does not promise to ease suffering, or erase it, but to enter into it. To strengthen weak hands, and to turn despair into praise.

Isaiah's vision points us forward to the Messiah, who will open the blind's eyes, lift up the poor, and make the lame leap for joy. The promise becomes a prayer in today's responsorial Psalm, so beautifully sung, Psalm 146. The Psalmist reminds us that the Lord opens the eyes of the blind, and lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous, and watches over the strangers.

And then in Matthew's Gospel today, John's disciples come, and they ask Jesus this simple question:
"Are you the one who is to come? Are you the one we're waiting for?"

And Jesus answers them. He says, "Now go, and tell John this: What you hear and what you have seen. The blind have received their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. The dead are raised, and the poor have been given the good news brought to them."

Isaiah's prophecy and the Psalmist's Psalm meet in Christ. The God who once spoke through the prophets now walks amongst his people, healing, lifting, and restoring.

Our theme for our Advent retreat this year has been the promise of Advent. And in the first week, we look at our story. Why were they waiting for a messiah? In the second week, Father Michael Coutts talked about Isaiah. And this week, if you can join us, Cardinal Collins will talk about the Psalms. Because—and then, in our fourth week, the title is, "The Promise is Magnified." We're going to look at Mother Mary, and her prayer of mercy, the Magnificat.

Because Saint Mary Magdalene went to that tomb expecting great sorrow, and found the risen Christ calling her by name. Isaiah's desert blossomed, and through the Psalmist's lament, when then became praise. And in our own lives, God still speaks that same word of joy. Not after the suffering, but through it.

When we follow Mary Magdalene's example, and keep our trust in God, in moments of joy and sorrow, we discover what it truly means to hear those words at the end of every Mass, "Go in peace." And like Mary Magdalene, when we are called to glorify the Lord, not only by what we say, but by our quiet witness of faith, who believes that even when we are in the desert that the joy will bloom again.

God bless.