

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent- Year C St Peter's Saturday and Sun 8:00 Masses- Dec 15/16, 2018

Zephaniah 3: 14-18 "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, o daughter Jerusalem."

Isaiah 12 "Shout aloud and sing for joy, great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

Philippians 4: 4-7 "The peace of God ...will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Luke 3: 10-18 "One is coming ... who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Introduction

No Jesus this Advent. Not a word from him ... well, except for that scary stuff two weeks ago about the sun and moon doing strange things as signs of the end of all things, but we can ignore that, can't we? The Gospels are supposed to give us Jesus' own words of love and affirmation, telling us everything is going to be ok and that we are fine just the way we are. Right? Well, not exactly.

Today, we get John the Baptist's words, telling us we have to change our ways, give stuff away, things like that. Next week it's Elizabeth and Mary talking excitedly about babies being born. Last week it was more about that same John fellow, dressed funny, eating the latest paleo diet, and yelling "Prepare the way of the Lord. Repent and be baptized."

But where is Jesus? Of course, that's the point, isn't it? It's Advent. We are waiting for Jesus. Jesus isn't born yet. He's not here yet. All we have is the promise of his presence. He's coming. Be patient. Get ready. Get right with God. Meanwhile, it's ok to have a certain kind of joy begin to well up in your heart, in expectation of the greatest event in human history, the birth of the Christ child, the long awaited Messiah.

We were gathered together this evening (morning) by a special prayer called the Collect. It invited us to celebrate with solemn worship *and* glad rejoicing. Right from the beginning of mass today, we get an invitation to be serious and solemn but, at the same time, joyful: "As we await the feast of the Lord's nativity, let us attain the joys of so great a salvation, and to celebrate those joys with solemn worship and glad rejoicing."

Zephaniah

The prophet, Zephaniah, sets things up for us, saying to Israel, God is with his people, but don't assume everything is going to be just fine if you ignore the worship of God and the works of justice. Worship and works ... Both are necessary. Still the bottom line message is: "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem ... The king of Israel, *the Lord is in your midst* ... he will renew you in his love ... " So we see that God has made us for a purpose and that purpose is to receive the blessing of being in His presence.

Psalms (Isaiah)

The psalms form Jesus' own prayer book. Jesus learned those prayers from Mary and Joseph and repeated them thousands of times over his life, including on the cross.

The psalmist says "Shout aloud and sing for joy. Great *in your midst* is the Holy One of Israel. He has become my salvation ... I will trust and will not be afraid ... With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Again we hear that God is present, but we should read that he is not just for Israel, but in our midst, in this place.

Exposition

I think it is fair to say that we tend to be a lot better at rejoicing when there seems to be something to rejoice about. Party time is happy time: birthdays, successes, the weekend. But what if things aren't going so well? In this congregation today, there are many who are experiencing loss, pain, and sadness of many kinds. Can we rejoice in the midst of those sufferings? This 3rd Sunday of Advent says we can. But, it doesn't happen automatically. First, we must be in relationship with the God who is the God of rejoicing. And, second, we must act as God acts, out of generosity and a holy desire to share whatever we have been blessed with.

On the first item, the Lord is already in our midst. That's the cry of the prophets throughout all of history. God is knocking on the door of our lives

to say that he is coming again if we will only be ready to receive him. The creator and the sustainer of all life is entering into the creation he has made. In this great mystery of our faith, which cannot be understood using ordinary human reason and wisdom, God has made us, then he has become one of us, in Jesus our saviour.

Luke

John could have given his message to way more people if he had just gone to Jerusalem, by the temple. But, he was out by the Jordan River, the exact same place where the people of Israel had crossed to enter into the land of God's promise. A thousand years later, John was symbolically telling people that, despite hard lives and being oppressed by a foreign nation, the promise was waiting to be fulfilled again in their own lives. That promised land was still waiting to be entered.

But the promised land includes the promise of a messiah. "The people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah." Isn't the world still looking for a messiah? But, over and over again we are disappointed. John wasn't looking for followers on Twitter. He was exhorting the people to sign on to *God's* Twitter feed. That's how he was proclaiming the Good News.

John knew that there was a hunger for God. He knew it wouldn't take much for them to make him their messiah. Lots of people in entertainment or sports or politics today give in to that very tempting idea. But John said No! I am not even close. The messiah is of a different order of holiness. But, you can be ready for him when he comes. How, they asked? By doing what is right in front of you, he answered.

If you have two coats, one belongs to someone else. If you have food and someone else has none, feed him. Mother Teresa tells the story, in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, of visiting a family with a bag of rice. She knew how poor they were. Upon receiving the rice, the mother immediately left to visit another family. Mother Teresa asked where she was going. "To bring some rice to a family which has no food at all." John is essentially providing the blueprint for that kind of transformation of the

world. It is the path back to God, to salvation, but it is also a blueprint for changing the world.

Philippians

Paul tells the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything. Receive the peace of Christ." The Sign of Peace during mass is not Catholic recess. It is a liturgical offering of that peace which cannot be understood by normal human measures. We want a little peace and quiet to read or watch TV. We want the absence of war. But the coming of Christ makes peace something that at the same time far exceeds what we could hope for ourselves or the world. It starts with ourselves, in our own hearts. It flows out from the interior experience of encounter with the Christ who came to offer himself as a sacramental sign of what God offers.

Call To Action

Pope Francis wrote an exhortation which fits perfectly for this day. *Gaudete et Exsultate, Rejoice and Be Glad*, is about the call to holiness, essentially what John was talking about i.e. how to be holy. "The Lord offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence."

Pope Francis answers the exact same question they asked John. What should we do to turn back to God? What can we do to be holy? He says: "Are you called to the priesthood or consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain."

People had to go out of their way to go and see John. But they went. Do we think it is different for us? Of course not. It is time for us to begin afresh. It is time for us to restart our relationship with God. The same invitation

comes to us in all times and in all places, but today is the exact moment *for us* to answer John's invitation to repent, to turn around, to turn to God, and to our brothers and sisters in need.

Each time we pray, as we will again, "Give us this day our daily bread", let us recognize that God is ready to be our source of strength and nourishment and wants us to call on him every day to satisfy our needs.

Prepare the way in your heart. Get rid of what keeps you from doing that. Restart your relationship with God. Enter that promised land with rejoicing, for God is in our midst.