

Homily For Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Dec 13, 2022

(Memorial - St. Lucy)

Zephaniah 3:1-2,9-13 "I will change their speech so that they may call on the name of the Lord."

Psalms 34: "He is near to the broken hearted and the crushed in spirit."

Matt. 21:28-32 "John came to you in righteousness and you did not change your minds and believe."

Both Saying and Doing

Introduction

As it does every day, the Word of God shines a bright light on the world, on the Church and on the hearts of men and women. That light always seems to make obvious that there are two ways of being. It's not a continuum of choices, like the world wants us to believe. In the Book of Revelation, as the tribulations fall on the world and the people, the first who suffer are those who have rejected God outright. But, as the judgment progresses, the light exposes those who claim to have said yes to Christ, but refuse to live as children of the light. I don't think it's too farfetched to see that we are in a time where the choice is becoming more and more clear: Between good and evil, between obedience and disobedience, between humble receptivity to the Lord and pride in ourselves as gods.

These readings are not about someone else. Nor are they for someone else. As the world draws battle lines, it becomes more and more clear, they are about our time, our world, our Church, our country, our lives, my life and yours. See how the power of two comes into play. Two prophets both announce the same message. One Old Testament prophet, Zephaniah. One New Testament prophet, John. Both demand: Be humble. Repent. There is a chastisement, a discipline, from God for your lack of obedience and your lack of humility. But He will come to save you if you are ready to admit having failed.

Matthew

It's always a delicious irony to hear that Jesus is preaching in the temple. Irony is when the audience, that's us in this case, knows something that the people in the

story don't know. The temple is, of course, the place of the worship of God's presence. But the tabernacle has been missing for 600 years, since the destruction of the first temple, so the temple is now more like a symbolic centre of worship for pilgrims. That has value on its own. But now God is really in the temple. The one whom they worship has entered the place of worship and made it holy in a profound way that it was not before.

That God, Jesus the anointed one, stands before them asking questions. John came preaching a kingdom based on love and mercy and humility and repentance. Jesus asks his listeners about John: "Did you believe him or not?"

Before telling a parable, Jesus uses a technique to teach his listeners. He asks their opinion. Those listening to him end up pronouncing judgment on themselves by their answer. In the parable Jesus tells, there are two sons. Both of them fall short of being good sons. The first one shames his father in a public defiance of his authority. I will not go. That's Satan's line: I will not serve. I will not submit. The second son is honourable towards his father, calling him 'Lord' or 'sir', but he disobeys, reminding us of those who call Jesus 'Lord' but do not do the Father's will and do not enter the kingdom of God.

Like the prodigal son, this son does something very shameful by saying no to his father publicly. The second son seems to be obedient and respectful, calling his father Lord and sir. Did the second son change his mind, or did he lie, or did he just get lazy and kind of forgot.

Jesus links the chief priests and the elders with the second son. They had the law but when God sent his prophet John the Baptist calling all to repent they did not believe him. They will find themselves watching the sinners enter God's kingdom before them . If they fail to repent they will be outside the kingdom.

Jesus insists to his disciples and the religious leaders that saying and doing are **both** necessary. The chief priests and elders were dumbfounded by the statement that those who are known sinners have greater status before God than they do. But everyone, then as now, Church leaders or ordinary members, is given the

opportunity to believe John, to believe Jesus, to believe the Father, to change our mind and do what is right before God and so enter the kingdom.

Whatever rebellion is in our hearts can be healed. God disciplines us, not out of hatred but out of loving desire for us to return to him. God can work with the humble. Pretending we don't sin is arrogance and disobedience.

We get so spiritually sick that we cannot reform ourselves. What Zephaniah said to Israel, ALL the prophets ALWAYS say. And, what the greatest prophet, John the Baptist said is that you and you and you and I must return to the Lord. That's why we keep celebrating Christmas. Jesus has already come but, in a real way, he is waiting to come again, into our hearts, into the middle of our lives. It's a choice.

Zephaniah

How does God want us to prepare our hearts for Christmas? Zephaniah was speaking about a faithful remnant in Israel. Even though the majority of the people of God are unfaithful, there will always be a remnant within the people. They are humble and lowly of heart. The humble recognize that everything we have is a gift and that all people are God's children.

St. Lucy

We have an amazing early 3rd century companion to accompany us on our journey and help us with this task of humility today. St. Lucy of Syracuse was born to a wealthy Christian family on the island of Sicily. At a young age secretly consecrated her virginity to Christ. Her mother pressured her into an arranged marriage with a pagan nobleman. When Lucy's mother was struck with a long and serious illness, Lucy convinced her mother to accompany her to pray at the tomb of St. Agnes. As a result, Lucy's mother was miraculously cured. Lucy then told her mother about her vow of chastity, and her mother consented to her refusal to marry. Lucy gave herself to serving persecuted Christians hiding in the catacombs.

The man to whom Lucy was betrothed, upon finding that Lucy was a Christian and had refused his hand in marriage, had her imprisoned under the persecutions of Diocletian. The judge sentenced Lucy to prostitution in a brothel, but God

rendered her body immovable and the soldiers were unable to carry out the task. They then tried to set her on fire, but the wood underneath Lucy would not burn. Finally, she was killed by the sword. Among her tortures her eyes were gouged out, making St. Lucy the patron saint of eye problems and blind people, among others. "Those whose hearts are pure are the temples of the Holy Spirit."

Call To Conversion

Saint Augustine wrote, "there are two wills. Your will has to be corrected so as to identify it with God's will; But do not try to bend God's will to adapt it to yours."

If in any way we have said to God: "I will not go", let us not be too ashamed to think of ourselves as the tax collectors and prostitutes. Let us turn our NO into a YES and enter the kingdom. Let us believe Zephaniah. Let us believe John the Baptist. And especially, let us believe Jesus whom we say is our Lord of our lives. Let us recommit ourselves at this very moment to turn our 'no' into a 'yes' and let us turn our 'yes' into action, into a new repentance, into a new return to the Lord.

Key Passages

Zephaniah: *The word of the Lord to Zephaniah, concerning Jerusalem: It has listened to no voice, accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord nor drawn near to its God. I will change their speech so that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him... On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me. I will remove your proudly exultant ones... I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord ... and no one shall make them afraid.*

Psalms: *My soul makes its boast in the Lord. Let the humble hear and be glad ... When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears... He is near to the broken hearted and the crushed in spirit.*

Matthew: *Jesus in the temple spoke to the chief priests and the elders, saying: What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said: Go and work in the vineyard. He answered: I will not, but later changed his mind and went. The second answered: I will go, sir, but did not. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said: The first. Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. And, even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe John.*

Prayer Over the Offerings: *Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings.*

Prayer After Communion: *O Lord, teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven*