

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Dec 15, 2020

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

Psalm 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."

Saying and Doing

Introduction

Two contemporary images come to mind for me today. One is from the stock market, which is a complete mystery to me. However, I hear them saying from time to time that there is going to be a market correction. I do know that this is always bad news for investments in worldly things. The other image is from Twitter. Likewise, I really don't get it, not having an account myself. However, I hear a lot about what is 'trending' on Twitter. That means a new topic is getting attention in the 'Twitterverse'.

We already know that every single day, the Word of God will shine a bright light on the world, on the Church and on our own lives. Sometimes it is a comforting light and sometimes we would rather that light shine somewhere else. At this time in the liturgical year, it's more like the last one. Today, our experience is that it is a LOT more like the last one. These readings are not about someone else. Nor are they for someone else. They are about our time, our country, our Church, our life, my life and yours.

An Old Testament prophet, Zephaniah, warns Israel that there is an upward trend in arrogance and idolatry and injustice, but that there is a coming correction by God for all of that. At the juncture between the Old and the New Testaments, the greatest prophet of all, John, tells people they are trending in the wrong direction. He tells them how turn that trend around. Repent. Turn back to God. The question Jesus asks his hearers, now as then, is: "Did you believe him or not?"

Zephaniah

But first we have Zephaniah, who prophesied shortly before the religious reform of King Josiah, about 630. He proclaimed "The day of the Lord" when God's own people would be crushed by their enemies because of their sins. Remember that Israel is an image of the Church. Remember that the people of Israel are us. Arrogance and injustice, idolatry and disobedience always lead to a correction. They did then and they will now.

In Zephaniah, as with the other prophets, threats are followed by consolations. The people will be restored, but only through a severe correction, a chastisement. I don't think there is any question that this is what is going on today.

Matthew

According to Jesus, who we say is everything to us, our entering the Kingdom of God will not be an accident. Before telling a parable, Jesus uses a technique to teach his listeners. He asks their opinion. The hearers end up pronouncing judgment on themselves by their answer.

In the parable Jesus tells, two sons both fall short. The first one shames his father in a public defiance of his authority. Remember that the father in the parable is God. 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.

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. Being what we are, the usual way for humans is that it will likely be through suffering. Seen in this light, our pandemic is not an accident of time and place. Nothing is an accident in God's

plan. In the Church, pandemics have always been understood as correction by God who disciplines us, not out of hatred but out of loving desire for us to return to him. God can work with the humble even if they have made mistakes. Pretending we don't sin is arrogance and disobedience.

At first, such a chastisement discourages people, but eventually people see that God only seeks to purify us from our sin. God always brings Israel back, first through invitation and loving kindness, but then through chastisement, through trials. The same occurs in the Church. 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.

Call To Action

We can't fix things but God can and God will. If we have become complacent, or angry or addicted, or 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. There is still time to learn from this spiritual market correction. There is still time for the kingdom of God to trend upward in our lives and in the life of the Church.

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: 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*