

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent
Dec. 16, 2018
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As we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord the issues that surround our society this Advent season are enormous. Once more this year we struggle to find peace - peace among the nations and among ethnic groups, peace in our own nation's city streets, peace in our work places, and peace even in our own homes.

We find ourselves amidst so many problems – the decline of the nuclear family, lack of jobs, abuse of children, dysfunctional families, and so on. Sometimes we feel that there is nothing we can do to overcome them.

The third Sunday of Advent, called *Gaudete* Sunday, really begins our anticipation of the 'joy' of Christmas. *Gaudete* means 'rejoice' and certainly that is the mood of our First Reading today.

The reading from the Prophet Zephaniah is filled with hope and promise. Like all the Old Testament prophets, his book begins with warnings and challenges, with threats and cautions, but by the final verses, as we have today, the prophet turns to words that say that God will never abandon God's people. He will be the savior, liberator, companion on the journey to healing. Fear not, be not discouraged,

Zephaniah announces. The savior who is to come “will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love.”

Our second reading again stresses *Gaudete* – “Rejoice! I shall say it again, rejoice!” St. Paul also tells us not to fear, not to have anxiety because “The Lord is near!” And this Lord will bring peace, God’s peace, which surpasses anything that we have ever known. So, don’t be afraid to pray to God and ask him anything, but do it with thanks in your heart for you know he will hear you. Unlike Lent, Advent is not a sad season even though we wear the same purple color. Rather, Advent is a season of approaching joy! As we light more Advent candles each week, the light gets brighter and brighter until Jesus comes.

All of these thoughts are preparing us for the Gospel message, the Good News announcement of John the Baptist, whom we encounter today. In the search for light, for direction, for answers to the questions that prompt us all to ask: What should we do? What should I do?

How many times have we been asking ourselves: What am I going to do? Christmas is 2 weeks away and I’m not ready for it – maybe all my gifts haven’t been purchased or wrapped, maybe my cards still haven’t been sent. What am I to do? Maybe I haven’t had the time to meditate on the advent themes to prepare myself for Christ’s coming. What am I to do? Maybe I don’t have time for my family because I am working and

driving all the time. What am I to do? Maybe I have not been feeling well, or someone close to me is ill. What am I to do? Maybe there are difficulties cropping up in my relationship with my wife or husband. What am I to do? Maybe people around us or we ourselves are suffering – from sickness, alcoholism, depression, addictions. What am I to do?

John offers us clear and practical options so that we can make the promises offered us by God a reality in our lives and in our world. God is coming, but He wants us to make his presence evident through honesty, respect, justice, and compassion, through a change of heart and attitude. We are being asked to have the courage to act so that encouragement fills the hearts of those who are discouraged.

John the Baptist exhorts us: The truth that the Lord is near, that the Lord is savior and victorious, reminds us that we cannot be discouraged, that we must be people of hope, that we will be the ones who take the initiative to speak encouragement, to work for peace and justice.

John the Baptist tells us that it is not about what God should do, but what we should do to bring God's plan for the world into the midst of all that we face each day. Can we hear John's challenge surrounded by the promise contained in today's other readings? We can respond to the challenge we face today by becoming the people of hope.

John the Baptist's voice still announces the coming of God's Kingdom amongst us. His call for repentance and conversion remains just as valid today as back then. Everything depends upon what each and every individual does in his or her own personal life. Salvation will not be guaranteed, and society will not be changed, unless each individual recognizes the absolute necessity for personal conversion and change.

John the Baptist issued a call for national repentance, proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom of God with the coming of the Messiah, and the need to repent and change our individual ways of human living. His audience must have wondered how all of their national problems were connected with their own personal lives. If God's Kingdom was about to be established, how could any one individual hasten or hinder its arrival?

“What ought we to do?” was their critical question. It is likewise our critical question. Their society was like our society. God's answer to their question and ours was and is: Everything depends upon YOU! Their society had a poverty problem, just as ours does. What could they do about it? John the Baptist said, they could share their resources. The person who had two coats could give one of them to the person who had no coat at all. Those who enjoyed surpluses could share of their abundance with those who had nothing. Would it solve their national poverty problem? YES, if enough people changed their lifestyles. Few

individual's effort alone would not suffice, but all individuals summed together would make all of the difference in the world.

Political corruption? People abusing their privileges as holders of the public trust? Certainly, there was a lot of such abuse back when John the Baptist was calling for a house cleaning. Likewise, we too, in our times, know of political corruption, those using their offices of public service for their own private and personal gain. What could individuals do about it? Probably not much. But nothing would change unless individuals changed. Individuals could do *something* rather than simply do nothing. John seemed to think it would make a difference if even one governmental official cleaned up his way of conduct and started running an honest operation.

Violence? Abuse of power? Abuse of others? The people in John's society certainly suffered such abuse. In today's society, we continue to have individuals use positions of privilege in order to abuse, humiliate and degrade others.

Society will become more honest when individuals become more honest because every society is simply the sum of its individual parts. Wars and violence will subside when we refrain from our own forms of violence toward each other. Poverty will begin to disappear when we are less self-centered and acquisitive. Sexual abuse will subside when we become purer and liberate our youngsters from the imprisoning lie that

they are simply the helpless victims of their inner sexual drives. We must see again that morality is not simply a private matter. We must challenge that nonsense that seduces us with the myth of free market morals. Morality is a public matter that involves us in sharing our common wealth, a common good into which we contribute our individual and personal lives.

Advent is a time for you and for me to clean up our acts. It's all a matter of getting down to the task of doing it first, instead of waiting for everybody else to first change *their* acts. Advent is a time for you and for me - personally. For if I am obsessed by what others are doing, thus diverting the moral spotlight from shining upon my own soul, nothing will change.