

Homily - 3rd Sunday of Advent C (Gaudete Sunday)

Today is *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* means 'rejoice'. In the First Reading, Zephaniah (Zep 3:14-18a) says to the Israelites: "Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!" In the Second Reading ([Phil 4:4-7](#)), St Paul encourages the early Christians, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!" But why rejoice? Zephaniah explains, "The LORD has removed the judgment against you he has turned away your enemies; the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear". Truly, this calls for celebration.

This prophecy foreshadowed our ADVENT SEASON because only Christ repealed the wages of our sins (Original and Personal sins), repelled our real enemy, the Devil (cf. 1Pet 5:8) and became our Emmanuel (God-with-us), the King of Israel in our midst. We, therefore, rejoice because, as St Paul declares, "The Lord is near". The day of the fulfillment, Christmas [and the Lord's final coming in glory], is now nearer to us than ever. And to express this joyful expectation liturgically, the Church "tones down" the color of Advent from Purple to Rose as evident from the vestments and the Advent Candle.

In our Gospel passage (Luke 3:10-18), John the Baptist concretizes his message last Sunday: "Prepare the way [road or highway] of the LORD". *This road is not like* the Alaskan project, nicknamed, "Road to nowhere." It is a special "Road to somewhere", a road into the hearts of all peoples. Think about it! What would happen if our President would be visiting Dunnellon soon? Very quickly, our highway 484 and the places of interest would be given a face-lift. The preparations would affect everybody. How much more are we obliged to fix the road into our hearts and the hearts of others since Jesus, our Truest President, the King of kings and the Lord of lords is coming!

John the Baptist shows today that his message is for everyone; not just for some people. People of all walks of life (the Crowds, Tax Collectors, Teachers, and Soldiers) asked him, "What should we do?" He had something for everyone that asked. To the crowds, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise"; to the tax collectors, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed"; to the Soldiers, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." What would John the Baptist required of us in today's world

(as a Politician, Lawyer, Priest, Religious, Psychologist, Doctor, Nurse, etc)? What would he say about abortions, discrimination, euthanasia, infidelity, violence, abuses, attempts at redefinition of marriage, among others? What about the tendency among so-called "Christ-ians" to throw Christ (God) out of public life and out of his own Birthday celebration, Christ-mas? To please non-believers, Christians quickly adopt "Happy Holidays" and reject "Happy Christmas"? What a shame!

This is evident in a beautiful story from an unknown source that Fr Kevin shared with me last week about the Blessed Mother's disturbing dream:

Joseph, last night I had a dream.... It was about the celebration of our Son's birthday. People prepared for weeks. They would go to the stores & everyone was busy buying many gifts & decorating their homes. Something was strange because the gifts were not for our Son.... [T]hey gave nothing to our Son. I don't think they even know Him. They didn't even mention His name. Isn't it all strange....? I'm happy that it was only a dream.

Beloved, without doubt, "Happy Holidays" is a subtle way the name of Jesus Christ has been ejected out of what has been his birthday commemoration for over one thousand years. Are we going forward or backward? It only reminds me of Pilate asking the Jews: "Will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?" They cried out..., "Not this man, but Barabbas!" (John 18:39-40). Once again, our world is rooting against Christ, and Christians are blindly going along with it. Christmas has become secularized. We light up our houses with beautiful decorative lights but people's hearts regress more and more into darkness. Jesus wants us to give him the gift of souls. For those who would resist and refuse to repent, John the Baptist has this warning: "[The] one mightier than I is coming.... His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Finally, in the words of St Paul, "I appeal to you ... brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2). Jesus declares, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).