

GOSPEL

LUKE 3:10-18

When all the people asked John, ‘What must we do?’ he answered, ‘If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.’

There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, ‘Master, what must we do?’ He said to them, ‘Exact no more than your rate.’ Some soldiers asked him in their turn, ‘What about us? What must we do?’ He said to them, ‘No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!’

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, ‘I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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 in a fire that will never go out.’ As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

On this third Sunday of Advent, the liturgy invites us to *joy*. Listen carefully: to joy. The prophet Zephaniah addresses these words to a small group of the people of Israel: “Sing aloud, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!”. Shout with joy, rejoice, exult: this is this Sunday’s invitation. The inhabitants of the Holy City are called to rejoice because the Lord has taken away his judgments against them. God has forgiven, he did not wish to punish! As a result the people no longer have any reason for sadness. There is no longer reason for desolation, but rather, everything leads to joyful gratitude toward God who always wishes to deliver and save those he loves. And the Lord’s love for his people is endless, tantamount to the tenderness of a father for his children, of a groom for his bride, as Zephaniah again says: “he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud

singing”. This is — so it is called — *the Sunday of joy*: the third Sunday of Advent, before Christmas.

This appeal by the prophet is particularly appropriate during the Season in which we are preparing ourselves for Christmas, because it can be applied to Jesus, the Emmanuel, the God-with-us: *his presence is the wellspring of joy*. Indeed, Zephaniah proclaims: “The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst”, and a little later he repeats: “The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory”. This message finds its full meaning in the moment of the Annunciation to Mary, narrated by the evangelist Luke. The words addressed to the Virgin by the Angel Gabriel are like an echo of those of the prophet. What does the Archangel Gabriel say? “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you! (Lk 1:28). He tells Our Lady to “Rejoice”. In an isolated hamlet of Galilee, in the heart of a young woman unknown to the world, God kindles the spark of happiness for the entire world. And today, the same announcement is addressed to the Church, called to receive the Gospel so that it may become flesh, concrete life. He says to the Church, to all of us: “Rejoice, little Christian community, poor and humble but beautiful in my eyes because you ardently desire my Kingdom, you hunger and thirst for justice, you patiently weave the fabric of peace, you do not pursue the powerful of the moment but remain faithfully beside the poor. And thus you fear nothing but your heart is in joy”. If we live like this, in the presence of the Lord, our heart will always be in joy — when there is ‘high-level’, full joy, and the humble everyday joy, which is peace. Peace is the smallest joy, but it is joy.

Saint Paul, too, exhorts us today to have no anxiety, to have no despair about anything, but rather, in every circumstance, to make our requests, our needs, our worries known to God “by prayer and supplication” (Phil 4:6). The awareness that we can always turn to the Lord in our difficulties, and that he never rejects our invocations, is a great reason for joy. No worry, no fear will ever be able to take away this serenity which comes not from human things, from human comforts, no: the serenity that comes from God, from knowing that God lovingly guides our lives, and he always does so.

Even in the midst of problems and suffering, this certainty fosters hope and courage.

However, in order to receive the Lord’s invitation to joy, it is necessary to be people willing to call ourselves into question. What does this mean? Just like those who, after listening to the preaching of John the Baptist, ask him: You preach this, but we, “What then shall we do?”. What should I do? This question is the first step for the conversion that we are called to carry out during this Season of Advent. Let each of us ask ourself: what should I do? A very small thing, but “what should I do?”. And may the Virgin Mary, who is our mother, help us to open our heart to the God-who-comes, so that he may shower our whole life with joy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How might you nurture a feeling of expectancy in your heart for the arrival of the Saviour this Advent?
- How long is it since you have felt the fire of the Holy Spirit in your life - are you desiring of this fiery encounter and experience of God that is promised for believers?
- How can you more boldly announce the Good News - be a voice in the wilderness - for a word that needs Jesus more than ever?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.