

3rd Sunday of Advent B/2008

We all like to go on vacation and, at times, dream to have it enjoyable. But, it often happens that instead of having a great time, we sometimes lament over it when we have forgotten the important things we should have taken along.

Such an example shows that if we want to have an enjoyable vacation, we better plan it well. The truth, however, is that some people do not want to plan, to prepare and to sacrifice. They want an instant joy that is not demanding and does not require a lot of work. The coming of Jesus is a joyful event, but it requires first of all our preparation in order to enjoy it. That is the message the readings convey in this third Sunday of Advent.

In the first reading, Isaiah describes the mission he has received from God for the captives back from exile in Babylon. God has anointed him to bring joy to the poor, healing to the sick, freedom to the prisoners and justice to all.

When a prophet speaks it is like in a dream; he does not know when and how the prophecy will be fulfilled. He does not even know the scope the prophecy will take. When we look at Jesus, with this background in mind, we realize that he is the one the prophet was talking about. In Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise to console his people and to bring him joy.

St. Paul invites the Christians of Thessalonica and, us alike, to that joy. His words are without ambiguity: Rejoice always. Thank God in all circumstances, for this is his will in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the prophecies. Refrain from evil.

What St Paul tells us is that, since we are awaiting the joy of the coming of the Lord, we must do all we possibly can in order to remain perfectly holy, irreproachable in our spirit, mind and body, praying and blameless. Only this way can bring us to share in the joy of Christ.

How can we have access to the joy Jesus brings about? It is by listening to the witness of those who were with him from the beginning of his mission. Today, we have the touching testimony of John the Baptist in the Gospel. John tells that Jesus is the light of the world. He came so that all might believe through him and come to salvation. That light shines in this time Advent as Jesus wants us to leave sin behind and receive his forgiveness in the sacrament of confession.

John came to bear witness to Jesus before the Jewish people. Today that witness continues through the Church that invites us to follow Jesus, the light of the world, and to embrace his message of salvation. But most importantly, each of one of us has to become, because of our faith, a witness to Jesus in the world. Like John, we have to help others to come to know Jesus.

What do we learn from today's readings? From the second reading, we learn what it means to be Christian. A Christian is a joyful person who has the assurance that with Jesus our salvation is certain. We have to bring that joy to others, especially in this Christmas season. A Christian is also a person who takes advantage of all the circumstances of life to pray to God as he strives, at

the same time, to be blameless in his life. Advent is a time of conversion and coming back, and being close to the Lord in prayer.

What we learn from the Gospel is the role of witness. A witness is not there to talk about himself, but rather about the one for whom he is giving testimony. This is what John does. He recognizes that he is not the Christ, but just his messenger. He does not claim honors and titles that do not belong to him. He says he is neither the Christ, nor Elijah nor any other prophet. He calls himself a “voice” whose aim is to convey a message. In this time of Advent, that message is still the same as John proclaimed it thousand of years ago: “make straight the way of the Lord”. This message challenges us, but we have to answer that challenge if we want to belong to Jesus.

Another thing we learn is the attitude of John the Baptist: he is honest, simple and humble. That should be the attitude of all those who, in one way or another inside the Church, have the task to preach. This is very important, because it can happen that a community can try to worship the preacher rather than Christ. It can still happen that a community has the eyes fixed upon the messenger than on Christ who is to come. We have to do everything for the glory of Jesus and not ours. We are just a simple pointer in the direction of Christ. God is able to give us the grace of forgetting ourselves and remembering only Christ. But we have to ask for that grace in prayer. Human pride sometimes prevents us from seeing this danger.

The last thing I would like to say is about the hidden presence of Jesus among us. For many years the people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah. But when Jesus came, they did not recognize him. Even when John tried to convince them, not everybody believed. Their blindness of heart and their way of thinking and living prevented them from recognizing Jesus. The same thing can happen to us when we are not attentive to the signs of Jesus’ presence in our midst. Jesus is present among us as we meet in his name, as well as he is present in our brothers and sisters. But, most importantly, he is present in the Blessed Sacrament. Let us not miss the opportunity to be reunited with him with a purified heart.

The time of Advent reminds us of the importance of preparing our hearts for Christ. Christ dwells in us when we open to him the doors of our hearts. The time we spend here on earth prepares for our encounter with Christ when he comes again. Let us ask the Lord to enlighten us so that we may see where we have failed in our commitments and come to true conversion. God bless you all!

Isaiah 61, 1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5, 16-24; John 1, 6-8, 19-28



Homily Date: December 14, 2008

© 2008 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20081214homily.pdf