

Third Sunday of Advent C/2009

When someone who has gone hiking, and has walked many miles, is about to come to the end of his walk, he is really happy. The hiking might have been tiring and exhausting, but when the end of the trail is before him, he feels a real joy. In spite of the fatigue endured, he is happy because he is able to come to the end and to attain his objective.

The readings of this Sunday of Advent invite us to such a situation of rejoicing and gladness. The reason of our joy is that the Lord is now near us more than before. He is closer to us more than ever. He comes to our encounter as our savior. For that reason, we have to rejoice and be glad.

In the first reading, the prophet Zephaniah situates that joy in the liberation God is about to bring about to his people of Israel. In his bounty, God has removed the judgment against his people; he has turned away his enemies by dwelling in their midst. Jerusalem has no reason for being fearful or discouraged anymore. Rather Israel has to rejoice, because God, his savior, is in his midst. The Lord will renew his people in love and they will sing to him with joyful songs.

These words of joy and rejoicing may leave us perplexed today as we are confronted with economic crisis, loss of employment and various conflicts that surround us. We should not forget, however, that our God is a God of joy and hope, who will triumph over anything that goes against him and his beloved ones.

For that reason, in spite of all the problems we can have, we should never let our arms go limp. We should never be discouraged as though we struggle alone. God is with us; he loves us and his joy will ultimately prevail over all the negative forces of evil that assail us. If so, the main message the prophet brings to us is to remind us that life has a meaning, even when it looks like a failure. God loves us and has a plan of salvation which he is about to implement for each one of us. Therefore, we have to be glad and rejoice; he will never abandon us.

What all this means is that whatever might happen to us, as weary as it might be, it cannot escape God's plan. Moreover, everything can only end up well, because we have the certainty that God who loves us will work everything for our good.

All that helps us understand why St Paul is insisting on the joy the Philippians should have. They should show their kindness to everyone and keep themselves from any anxiety, because the Lord is at hand. They should take advantage of any circumstance of life and make known their requests to God through prayer, petition and thanksgiving. If they do so, the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What St Paul tells the Philippians, he tells us too. We can bring our prayers, petitions and requests to God. God is ready to listen to us, because that is his will. We can pray for ourselves, for our families, our friends and for anything we think is important to us from the past, for the present or the future. We can ask forgiveness for the past, help for the present and guidance for the future. In all these prayers, we should never forget above all to be thankful to God for the gift of life and for everything else we are and have in this world. If we pray in such a spirit, we will certainly have the peace of Christ in us.

In order to come to all that spiritual vision, we need to convert ourselves from our sins. We need to turn to the Lord with the whole of our heart. That is what the Gospel is inviting us to today. In fact, the crowd of different peoples who went to listen to John the Baptist had just one concern, namely not to miss the opportunity to make peace with God. And this is what Advent is all about.

The crowd asked John, "What shall we do"? On this question, he exhorted them to perform concrete acts without which their conversion to the Lord would have no sense at all. Besides sharing what they have with the needy, he enjoined them to show correctness, justice and honesty in their jobs and in dealing with their fellows.

As it can be seen, it was John's conviction that there is nowhere a person can serve God better than in his daily work. That is why he did not order people who came to him to quit their jobs for the search for holiness or spiritual satisfaction. Rather, he wanted them to work out their salvation by doing the right thing in their own jobs. Such a requirement has not changed even today: Conversion from within the job; salvation from within the job; that is what is needed.

Everything that John asked of people, he lived it first by his own example. He shared with others the word of God. But most importantly, he was honest with people by telling them the truth that he was not the Christ. He was just a forerunner and not the Christ. Christ was greater than him to the point that he could not even loosen the thongs of his sandals.

We need that kind of humility today more than ever from anyone who has a particular work inside the Church. There is a tendency of boasting a lot because of our gifts and talents, as though we are bigger than Jesus to whom the Church belongs. That is why the person of John the Baptist presents a real challenge to each one of us who works for the Lord so that we do not appropriate unduly the merits and the glory of our Lord Jesus as though they are ours.

John also told people the truth about the judgment that was imminent with the coming of Christ. At the judgment, Christ will separate the good from the bad as the chaff is separated from the wheat. However, those who had fulfilled their duty to their fellows and who had faithfully done well their daily work would face that judgment with confidence.

That is the message the Lord brings to us in this Third Sunday of Advent. We ask him to increase our joy in him. We ask him to help us overcome all the problems of life we have and come to know his peace that surpass any good this world can give us. May God bless you all!

Zephaniah 3, 14-18a; Philippians 4, 4-7; Luke 3, 10-18



Homily Date: December 13, 2009

© 2009 – Rev. Felicien I. Mbala, PhD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20091213homily.pdf