

Third Sunday of Advent C/2015

The readings of this third Sunday of Advent talk about the joy of the return of the Lord. They announce the gladness that will transform Jerusalem as God will visit the city. They invite us to take practical actions which can help us deserve that joy.

The first reading describes the prophecy of Zephaniah. It announces the joy of the victory of Israel over its enemies and the end of their exile. It promises a joy that will transform the whole country because of the presence of the Lord in its midst.

What is behind this text is the idea that whenever God intervenes in favor of his people, the prospect of defeat disappears. Another idea is the truth that God is the source of the joy of his people. The last idea is related to the truth that as God's people rejoice because of the blessings received, God also rejoices over his people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as John the Baptist prepares the people of Israel to the joy of the coming of the Lord. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of different categories of people reacting to John's teaching. Then, it shows the practical actions that John invites them to take in order to prepare the way for the Lord.

After that, the Gospel talks about the questions of the people who were wondering whether John was the Christ. The Gospel ends up with John's response by recognizing that he was not the Messiah. Finally, the Gospel talks about John's exhortation to the people.

What do we learn from this Gospel? As I have done the last two Sundays in highlighting a specific focus to work on in the awaiting of the Lord, today I want to focus on the necessity of prioritizing our spiritual actions in preparing for the return of the of the Lord.

Let me start from an example of life in order to let you understand what I mean. In fact, I support a couple of students in the Congo for their studies. As I went to the Congo very recently, I planned a couple of actions to take in their favor. For instance, I thought to buy them some clothes, furniture for their home and some food, etc.

To my surprise, they told me that though those needs were real, what they wanted in priority was a computer and a printer for their work and seminars. I confess that I was surprised by their choice. Instead of furniture or food so necessary for their life, my students preferred above all a computer and a printer for their university work.

This spirit of prioritizing things is what we need at this time of Advent. We have to prioritize our actions in this awaiting of the Lord. We need practical actions which can help us not miss the opportunity of preparing the way for the Lord.

There is always a tendency in each of us to delay things we can do for today, even when they are important, and to put them for tomorrow. After a while, we realize that we did not do anything though many times, we said that we will do it. This is what the different people who were listening to the preaching of John have done.

This is exactly the opposite of the listeners of John the Baptist. Once they heard the message, they reacted immediately: "What can we do, they said?" John, in turn, proposed to them concrete acts to perform in order to show their willingness to change. When we look at those proposals, we see that those are things we need to do also at this time of Advent.

The first act to perform is sharing with others. As strange as it may appear, we have to learn to share with others. In fact, we have been educated in such a way that what counts first is my needs. In such an atmosphere, it becomes problematic to think of others and their needs. And yet, that is what John proposed to the crowd, namely to do exactly the opposite they have been told in their education. Today more than ever, we have to share with those less fortunate and needy. This is a way of making our Advent alive and real.

The second act to perform is practicing honesty. Honesty means to speak the truth and to act truthfully. I believe that many among us strive to be honest in their undertakings and in their life. However, there is often a little bit of shadow when it comes to saying things rightly as they should be, or to treat people correctly and without preconceived ideas. At Advent we are reminded that to act correctly and honestly, to treat others with sincerity and impartiality is the best way to prepare to for Christmas.

The third act to perform is Justice. Justice means acting equitably and without a double standard. This is a point on which each one of us has to work hard, because our justice can be influenced by emotion, passion and interests. For all that reason, Advent is an invitation that we respect the Law and be content with what we possess.

But where shall we practice those virtues? Let us respond with the Gospel. In fact, as different groups of people came to John for counseling, he did not propose to them to quit their job in order to look for holiness. On the contrary, he wanted them to work out their salvation by doing the right thing within their job. In that sense, our daily job and undertaking become the place of our pursuit of sanctification. We cannot serve God better than in our daily work.

Why is John the Baptist so concerned with the practical way of life? I believe that John the Baptist wants to draw our attention to the fact that Christian faith has not only a spiritual dimension, but also a material dimension. These two cannot be separated without undermining the integrity of our faith in Jesus. That is why anytime we neglect to care for human needs; we miss the opportunity to live up to the integrity of the Christian faith.

How did John himself perform his ministry? In fact, what John the Baptist required of people, he was the first to live it. For instance, he shared the good news with people. He was honest with them by telling them that he was not the Christ, but just his servant, etc.

By doing so, John the Baptist teaches us humility and the recognition of our merits and its limits. Today more than ever, we need people who are humble, especially among those who have various ministries inside the Church. This is an important point, because there is a tendency of boasting a lot because of our gifts, talents and skills. That is why John the Baptist challenges us that we do not appropriate unduly the merits and the glory of our Lord Jesus as though they are ours.

Let us, then, pray that the Lord may help us this Advent to come close to him and to look for our holiness through our daily jobs. Through the example of John the Baptist, may he help us to make room for Him in our lives! May the Lord bless our undertaking so that we find our joy in finding him in what we do! God bless you all!

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



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