

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Advent

December 16-17, 2017

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

Preacher: Sr. Janet Korn

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if we had an Isaiah speaking to us in the Convention Center, clothed with a robe of justice, preaching joyful and encouraging words of hope, freeing us from lethargy and fatigue?

Wouldn't it be wonderful, too, if we had someone who could heal us from feelings of hopelessness and discouragement, a voice telling us how much we are loved and freeing us from all that holds us captive?

Or, how about Mary singing to us from Geva's stage about how much God loves and remembers us and how God wants us to be happy? A voice reminding us that God scatters the proud and raises up the lowly, that God feeds the hungry and sends the rich away, empty.

We could also use a John the Baptist crying out in Washington Square Park that there is light, that there is someone among us who can make us whole, who is full of grace, courage, truth and blessings. We could use a John the Baptist who reminds us that there is someone willing to speak truth to power, to heal, to love and to die at the hands of misguided authority.

These readings are happy, hopeful and full of promise. These ancestors of ours were very strong, hopeful and holy people. They prepared us and told us about the man who would soon be one of us, Jesus.

From what our speakers each said it seems that their moments in history weren't too different from our own. The rich were oppressing the poor and there were leaders who cared more about their personal power than the welfare of the people they were elected to care for. The important thing about Isaiah, Mary and John the Baptist is that they saw the truth and they weren't afraid to speak about it. Maybe they were voices in the wilderness but they weren't afraid to make their voices heard.

We may ask ourselves, why is it that in the midst of these happy promises bad things happen? Just as I was writing this, a phone call came from my niece with the very sad news that my grand nephew died from a drug overdose. He was a bright young man, 21 years of age, with a future full of hope. He is one more victim of the opioid epidemic. We know there are thousands more.

Our world suffers from so much more than drugs. We see refugees fleeing desperate situations in their homelands...daily bombings, little food, nowhere to go except to escape in a small boat, bloated with people who spend their little cash on a ride to safety. We know the results of their search for safety—drownings or living years in a migrant camp in a country that doesn't want them.

Daily we have seen children and adults on our TV screen dying of hunger while 40 percent of food in the United States goes uneaten. That amounts to 1,400 calories per person per day and 31 million tons of food added to landfills each year.

Another tragedy that we see in our global economy is the widening gap between the rich and the poor. This may be the saddest phenomenon and the source of so many global problems.

But today is referred to as Gaudete Sunday. We light a pink candle on our Advent wreaths and the celebrant dons rose vestments to signify that Christmas is near. We recall the hope we have because of the coming of Jesus. Despite the sufferings mentioned above we still rejoice, we must rejoice, we have reason to rejoice.

At my grand nephew's wake many, many other youth—black, white and brown—came to pay their respects. Many wept, one placed a rosary in his lifeless hands, another placed his hand on his forehead and prayed, and still another put a holy card in his pocket. There were multiple gestures of caring and love. And, it appeared, that his life lost was a strong message of change and conversion for many of his friends. Much hope and goodness flowed from his death. In the midst of the pain there was cause for rejoicing.

And, there are so many movements and voices of hope supporting struggling immigrants and refugees. There are voices like Isaiah's and Mary's and John the Baptist's speaking out against the growing economic divide. These voices live among and within us. Like the prophets of old, they preach and shout the good news. Each one of us can be the voice in this wilderness!