

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent

December 15-16, 2018

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

Preacher: Nancy DeRycke

“It came upon a midnight clear...of angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold...Peace on the earth, good will to all...” Wait a minute: I don’t know about you, but I look around and don’t see a lot of peace on earth or hear a lot of “Joy to the world.”

All the Christmastime songs tell us to be joyful (“It’s the most wonderful time of the year, “I’m dreaming of a White Christmas,” “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire”). Our songs paint such a beautiful picture of joy, but something’s missing—most have been pushed to background music or don’t even seem to talk about Jesus or God-with-us. People just seem to be rushing around, driving crazily, shopping to beat the clock, hearing TV news of more violence or conflict in our city, world, church or politics. It was the same back in the prophets’ times and when John the Baptist came out of the desert, trying to get people to “prepare him room.” The world had always had problems, trials and conflict. People of all times have asked today’s Gospel question: “What can we do?”

So how about taking a look at some favorite Christmas hymns? Maybe we can understand songs that talk about poor shepherds in the “First Noel.” They knew life is hard; they were tired of their jobs and taking care of everything around them. No one gave them any respect because they were dirty from the fields and couldn’t do the required ritual washings to pray. Maybe we can understand songs of feeling insignificant: that Little Drummer Boy felt he didn’t have much to give—playing his drum or maybe what we do each day.

Maybe we can relate to feeling imperfect: “O Holy Night” (long lay the world in sin and error pining) until Jesus (and the soul felt its worth).

Maybe Christmas isn’t for those who have it all together (no one to worry about who’s going through sickness or hard times, no trouble in family or at school or work). Maybe there’s no perfect Christmas—not even the first one.

Perhaps you and I can celebrate Christmas *because* we are a little fearful, incapable or worried, making mistakes or blowing it, occasionally. Jesus came for you and me to remind us that, no matter how stressed or troubled or mixed up we and our world is, as Zephaniah says in our first reading, “...God is in our midst, rejoicing over us with gladness, renewing us with God’s love....”

They asked John “What shall we do?” He said to slow down and ease up. Be generous; if someone’s hungry feed them. Don’t take more than you’re entitled to, be kind; take care of each other. Christmas isn’t for people who are full of themselves; it’s for people who are full of care for others. That’s what makes God and us joyful.

What shall we do? Just keep doing the good things we are all ready doing.

- Parents: Keep up the good work; spend time and listen to your children.
- Those working: Do it fairly with highest quality—just *because*.
- Retired or older folks: You are needed; stay interested in life—we need your wisdom and gifts.
- You with health or other problems: Teach us how to believe and how to help.
- Young people: You’re important, even if it’s tough sometimes. Remind us how to hug and play and love.
- People in relationships: Show us real love is possible; or get help.
- All of us trying to believe: Walk your talk; live passionately. Let God in and you will find Joy—not because things are easy or perfect or “calm and bright,” but because our God is here.

This is the Sunday traditionally called “Gaudete”—a time of joy. Maybe we need to find joy right where we are no matter what is happening. When was the last time I just laughed? Or when you said I love you? Or sat at the tree and pondered our blessings? We can’t buy joy or wrap it up; we have to *be* it, catch it, and let it catch us. That’s how to prepare for Christmas. John is saying if we live life honestly and openhandedly, we will be less weighed down, more free to share “Joy to the world....Let every heart prepare him room...” as we move into these next two weeks:

“Rejoice! Your Kindness should be known to all. Have no anxiety at all...pray with thanksgiving...” God is truly in our midst—no matter what.

