

Homily of Third Sunday of Advent Year B

The first part of the first reading was the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the mission of the Messiah. Jesus used this prophecy to introduce himself at the very beginning of his ministry in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." This proclamation summarizes our prayers: That many may receive glad tidings; that many may receive liberation and healing from afflictions and sicknesses; that the oppressed may gain freedom; that our desires may be acceptable to the Lord. Amen.

John the Baptist was a son of a priest, Zechariah. The expectation was that John would become a priest like the father. Instead, he disappeared from home and went into the desert. While in the desert, the word of God came to him. "He went throughout the whole region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:2-3). The Jews did not understand John's mission. They sent the priests and the Levites to John, the son of their fellow priest, to demand an explanation for his action. We read the dialogue between John and the priests and the Levites. Also present at the discussion were some Pharisees. John explained to them, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord." John announced to them that he was only a messenger of the Messiah.

There were two kinds of audience who came to John. The first kind accepted John's message and asked, "What then should we do?" John gave them further explanation: "Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." To tax collectors who asked what they should do, Jesus said, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." To soldiers who asked the same question, John said, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." He said to all of them, "Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance..." (Luke 3:8-14). We are the crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers. If we do what John advises us, then we have made the way straight for the Lord.

In the Gospel of today we see another kind of audience, the priests, the Levites, and the Pharisees, who were not interested in the message. Instead of asking what they should do, they questioned: "Who are you?" "What are you then?" "Why are you baptizing if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" Their questions show that they neither accepted John nor his message. There are times we refuse to accept the truth. We question, "Who do you think you are to correct me?" "Who are you to teach me?"

The pink candle that is lit today is the candle of joy. We have a beautiful song of joy in the first reading and the Psalm is the Blessed Virgin Mary's magnificent song of joy. St. Paul says in the second reading, "Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks." One of Jesus' missions is to restore joy to humanity. He says that he came that his joy may be in us and our joy be complete (John 15:11). The joy that Jesus brings is not the worldly happiness and satisfaction but inner joy that helps us to navigate our way in our faith journey. This is why Prophet Nehemiah says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). The world is filled with so much that take away the joy of the Lord from people. Many people are going through difficult times that take away the joy of the Lord from them. Our life is in danger without the joy of the Lord. Let us make straight the way of the Lord by refraining from every kind of evil so that Jesus comes into our hearts and life and bestows his joy on us.

May this Christmas bring the joy of the Lord to us and to the world. We pray that God restores the joy of the Lord to many who do not have it and who desire it. Amen.