

Homily of Third Sunday of Advent, Year C, 2024

Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

On this third Sunday of Advent, we light the pink candle, which is called “the Candle of Joy.” The third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudate* Sunday. *Gaudate* is the Latin word for rejoice. The antiphon of the Mass taken from the second reading of today’s Mass is, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Latin translation: *Gaudate in Domino semper; interim dico, gaudate*. From the antiphon to the second reading, the words ‘joy’ and ‘rejoice’ appear twelve times. Yes, in the middle of so much troubles in personal lives, in families, in our country, and in the world; we are invited to pray for the joy of the Lord that is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

The first reading is a prophecy of Prophet Zephaniah to the people of Israel when infidelity to God was very high. The worship of God was at a very low level. However, there was a remnant of the people of Israel who remained faithful. The prophecy was of hope and encouragement to the remnant faithful.

Zephaniah prophesied, “The Lord has removed the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies; the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, Zion, do not be discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior, who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love...” (Zephaniah 3:15-17).

There are many desolate people who are going through various kinds of crises that stifle joy in their lives and leave them sad a lot of times. May the prophecy of Zephaniah come to fulfillment in their lives. May they no longer be afraid or discouraged. May they be renewed in God’s love. May God, in his infinite mercy, replace their sadness with joy. May God remove the judgement upon those who suffer injustice and turn away their foes. May they shout for joy and sing joyfully to God. May they exult with all their heart.

May God’s children gladly testify God’s goodness with today’s psalm, “God indeed is my salvation; I am confident and unafraid. For the Lord is my strength and my might, and he has been my salvation. With joy, you will draw water from the fountains of salvation ... Sing praise to the Lord for he has done glorious achievement” (Isaiah 12:2-3, 5).

When we remain in prayer, have confidence in God, and be unafraid, no matter the circumstance; and in fact, give thanks to God in all circumstances, then, we are able to overcome our anxieties, and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

Our reflection on the importance of spiritual preparation for Christmas continues today. The Advent season offers us three major spiritual invitations: (1) invitation to prayer, (2) invitation to charity, (3) invitation to repentance.

St. Paul highlights the invitation to prayer in the second reading. He says, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make requests known to God” (Philippians 4:6). What is new or different, and is there any progress in my prayer life as we begin the third week of Advent?

In the gospel, John the Baptist emphasizes invitation to charity in these words, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise” (Luke 3:11). John the Baptist invites us to help, support, and be charitable to those in need. As we begin the third week of Advent, what have I done or am planning to do in the area of charity?

John the Baptist emphasizes invitation to repentance in these words, “Stop collecting more than what is prescribed. ... Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages” (Luke 3:13-14). John invites us to repent from dishonesty, greed, lies, high-handedness, and extortion. We are sinners and have come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an obligatory act of contrition for us Catholics. As we begin the third week of Advent, let us make sure that we fulfill this obligation before Christmas.

May we experience God's transforming graces of the sacred season of Advent and become joy-filled as we celebrate the birth of Christ. Amen.

Joy to the world the Lord is come

Let earth receive her king

Let every heart prepare Him room

And heaven and nature sing

And heaven and nature sing

And heaven and Heaven and nature sing

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP