

3rd Sunday of Advent
December 16, 2018
“From Discouragement to Peace!”

Zeph 3:14-18

Phil 4:4-7

Lk 3:10-18

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

We live in discouraging times. Most people find it hard to be optimistic when they face what is happening in our nation and in our world. We have a world religion whose extremists would kill anyone who refuses to believe exactly as they do – We have countries at war economically if not militarily – We have a polarized nation wherein our leaders seek their personal ideology instead of the common good – wherein rancor and invectives are justified as free speech and wherein mob rule trumps law and order.

We have a media owned by billionaires, which espouses half-truths – so-called statesmen and women who lie – a morality that has been turned upside down – and Church leadership that has not purged itself of all those who have abused and exploited others.

Along with all these issues, as we personally age, we become more aware of our own failings. We have all sinned, failed, and made mistakes. There is not one of us who doesn't have regrets about what we have done or have failed to do.

And the great temptation is to become cynical and give up. We can lose hope. We are tempted to succumb to the culture and cast aside all that is expected of us as Christians and as disciples of Jesus!

The prophet Zephaniah wrote for the exiles in Babylon who were, truly, much worse off than we are today. They had lost everything. They had failed God and it would seem that God had failed them. After chastising the unfaithful, Zephaniah spoke to those who had not become cynical or lost heart.

He had a message for those who had remained faithful to the covenant and to God. He told them to rejoice in their hearts. God had neither forgotten them nor abandoned them. One day there would be a restoration. One day they would be ruled by someone who would, truly, usher in a kingdom of justice and peace – because he would love them

as God loves them!

In the Gospel selection, John the Baptist is preparing for the advent of Jesus. The times were as bad as ours today. A foreign power occupied and ruled the land – The religious leadership had become corrupt – There was great economic inequality – And most people struggled just to get by. However, neither the Romans nor the priests, scribes, and Pharisees came to be baptized – Only the common folk came – along with the Hebrew soldiers and the tax collectors, both who were considered “sell-outs” and traitors.

Yet, those who came were honest. They knew they had sinned – They knew they had failed in many ways. And John had the same plan for what they should do in order to become better and what God wanted them to be.

It was this: “Do what you are supposed to be doing in every circumstance.” Do the very best with everything you have to face. Be fair; be honest; be kind! Don’t serve yourself in any way. And, above all, be generous. Everything you have comes from God – so share with those who have nothing or next to nothing! Because the one who is coming, comes with the Holy Spirit and with fire! He comes with divine love and divine retribution. He will separate the faithful from the unfaithful – the good, from the ungodly – And they will be blessed or cursed accordingly for all eternity!

Brothers and Sisters, from the dawn of our human existence there has never been any escape from the discouraging things in our world. Every age has its struggles and hardships. However, Jesus has brought us salvation. Despite the world, despite the culture, despite our past mistakes, failures, and sins, God never stops loving us!

But we must respond to that love. We must own up to our sins, past and present. We must truly convert our hearts. We must make the necessary changes in our personal lives.

We can do all this because, as St. Paul proclaims, there is truly cause for rejoicing! For we can be forgiven – We can be acquitted – We can be exonerated – We can embrace, in our hearts, the peace which surpasses all human understanding. And that peace is the Peace of God who comes to us in Jesus Christ himself!

So, let us pray that we can prepare ourselves to embrace Jesus and the peace that he, alone, can bring!

Amen.

December 16, 2018

Msgr. Russell G. Terra