

3rd Sunday of Advent
December 12, 2021
“Loving Kindness, Joy, and Peace”

Zeph 3:14-18
Phil 4:4-7
Lk 3:10-18

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

The past two years have probably been the worst years of their lives for Americans and for those of the rest of the world. Besides all the ordinary struggles that individuals and families have to face – we have had to deal with the Covid Pandemic. This has turned everyone’s personal world upside down. Millions have died from the virus – and millions more will suffer effects of the virus for years to come!

People have reacted, or responded, to this world-wide upheaval in many different ways. Countless people have become depressed – Drug and alcohol abuse have increased – Child and spousal abuse have escalated in vulnerable families. Suicide rates have gone up. And people are polarized over politics and government mandates!

Yet, on the other hand, there are those millions of caregivers who, despite everything, have expended themselves for the rest of us. Often, this is at great personal cost to themselves! We don’t know what motivated these people. However, I suspect that they answered a personal call from God that came to them in some way hidden, perhaps even from themselves. In answering that call they became a gift, rather than a burden to others. Somehow, there was a spark of love and optimism in their hearts which ignited into a special love and kindness for everyone they served and helped.

The Chosen People at the time of Zephania experienced upset and uncertainty not unlike our own today. There was social and political unrest – Empires on every side of them were powerful and threatening – Most of their own countrymen and women had become unfaithful to the Lord God – and lived selfish lives of self-service. All of this must have been discouraging and disconcerting to the few who remained faithful to God!

Consequently, the prophet spoke of a restoration. He spoke of hope. He spoke of the joy that God experienced when people remained faithful to Him! Someday their faithfulness would result in a whole new life for them – a life of security, peace, joy – and above all, love!

The Gospel of Luke finds the Chosen People suffering from Roman occupation, Pharisaical religious leadership, spiritual complacency and hypocrisy – as well as class and economic inequality.

Consequently, John the Baptist proclaimed a time of spiritual renewal. It was a time to prepare for God visiting His People. It was a time for everyone to become closer to God Himself! However, it demanded conversion of heart and change of behavior.

It is interesting to discover who the people were that came to the Jordan. They were the poor, common folk from the fringes of society. Tax collectors, who were despised and hated by everyone, came as well. Soldiers of King Herod, who were supposed to keep the peace, were also there.

When each group asked what they should do, John, no doubt, surprised them all with his answers. Not more prayers – Not more sacrifices in the Temple – but a new kindness that was a sign of something far deeper – It would be a sign of their love for God – a sign of their awareness of God’s loving kindness toward them! Thus, they were to manifest a new generosity, a new fairness, a new honesty, a new way of treating everyone – like God continually treated them!

Brothers and Sisters, awareness of God’s love and kindness for us should lead us to a new interior joy and peace. This joy and peace will get us through the worst of anything we experience.

The Philippians of the New Testament passage were downcast and discouraged. They were suspect by the pagans around them, divided by eternal religious differences, personally selfish and often isolated. Paul, himself, was in prison and suffering greatly. Yet, there was joy in his heart because of the promises of Jesus and his relationship with him.

Consequently, Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice because God loves them. God has sent Jesus to bring them His loving kindness and salvation. More than anything else, the Philippians were to be kind. In fact, their loving kindness should set them apart from all others. It should spring from the joy and peace in their minds and hearts that knows what others have failed to grasp!

So, on this Sunday for rejoicing, let us rejoice in our own hearts. God continues to love us even in the worst of times. God is always with us, whoever and wherever we are. Moreover, he comes again each year in a special way with the birth of His Son in our hearts and in our midst.

So let us pray, that we can become changed ourselves. May we develop a loving kindness that leads to a new unselfish generosity in all that we do!

Amen.

December 12, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra