

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Dec. 15-16, 2018, Cycle C

This is Gaudete Sunday – rejoice Sunday – and we hear the Prophet Zephaniah from the Old Testament encourage the people of his time “to shout for joy... Be glad and exult!” Why? Because, the Prophet Zephaniah says: not only is the Lord coming, “The Lord is already in your midst.” So convinced is Zephaniah that the Israelites can rejoice that he says it again: “The Lord, your God, is in your midst.”

Zephaniah is trying to rally a people who have been burdened with war, seen their capital of Jerusalem demolished, and many were forced into the state of being refugees. Yet, the prophet Zephaniah calls on his fellow Israelites: “To shout for joy ...sing joyfully... and be glad and exult.” They have nothing to fear – for with God in their midst they can move forward to a new life.

Was Zephaniah giving his people false hopes and empty promise? Surely the ancient Israelites must have thought Zephaniah was crazy; or wondered could what he says really come true?

Every Advent – we modern day Christians are also called on to rejoice and be glad – especially on this third Sunday of Advent – where the theme of joy dominates our liturgy. St. Paul told the Christians of his day: “to Rejoice in the Lord always, because the Lord is near.” St. Paul’s message is meant for us modern day Christians too – the joy of this third Sunday of Advent is not just because Christmas is close at hand, but we rejoice because God came in Jesus 2000 years ago – became one with the human race – and is still in our midst today working to bring about His Kingdom.

Like the Israelites of Zephaniah’s day; our modern world is really not too terribly different from theirs. We are burdened by war and destruction still. Every day we pick up our newspaper, we can read about our sons and daughters dying in faraway lands, children being abused, government and corporate corruption, and it seems stories about serial murderers are always popping up. We are probably as skeptical about a peaceful and just world ever coming about as were the ancient Israelites – perhaps now more so – since we believe that in Jesus God is indeed come and is in our midst. Is God failing us? Are we being exhorted to be joyful people or illusions? I don’t believe so. We must remember peace, restoration of a broken world and justice do not simply drop down from heaven. As followers of Jesus, Advent reminds us we must work along with God in the fashioning of peace, justice, and restoring a broken world.

Then what shall we do? That’s the question John’s disciples asked when they believed his message that the Lord is near. What shall we do? Is what we need to ask – and John’s answer is simple: we need do nothing radical as leave everything and join a monastery, or adopt a life of permanent fasting and penance. John says we just need to be honest and fruitful in the everyday lives we lead: Those who have more than they need share with those who have less; tax collectors be honest. Soldiers do not take advantage of the vulnerable. We can extend this and say: parents cherish your children; spouses be faithful to each other; neighbors live in peace.

John the Baptist is saying that for God to bring in His Kingdom of Justice and Peace, all we need to do are some simple reforms in the way we live our everyday lives!

Are God’s promises empty, is our cause for joy sterile? Not if we turn to God, reform our lives and trust that God is indeed in our Midst – indeed within our very selves – so rejoice!