

Third Sunday of Advent - C
Zephaniah 3:14-18a;
Philippians 4:4-7;
Luke 3:10-18
Little Flower - 12/16/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. Today is often called Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means *rejoice*. At the midpoint of Advent, we are called to “*Rejoice in the Lord always*” because “*indeed, the Lord is near*” [Phil. 4:4-5]. As a sign of rejoicing, priests are invited to put aside the violet vestments of the season and to wear rose vestments.

However, the truth is that the Lord is not only near; he is already here. We talk about the three comings of Christ: his historical birth 2000 years ago, his rebirth in our lives and hearts today, and his future and final coming in glory. The reality is that Jesus is alive and present within and among us. He is present in his Word, especially in the Gospels. He is present in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. He is present in his Spirit living within and among us. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to rejoice in the Lord always.

As Christians we are called to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving. In today’s reading from Zephaniah, we heard, “*Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!*” Unfortunately, too often Christians allow themselves to become only prophets of gloom and doom, hell fire and damnation. Christians are a people of faith. We are to rejoice in the Lord always because we believe that Jesus has already won the victory over sin, suffering, sickness, and death—the victory over evil in all its forms. If we do not believe that, we really do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Second, we are called to be optimistic. Again, Zephaniah wrote, “*Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior...*” Christians are a people of hope. Christian hope is the confident awaiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises. Although Christians should not be presumptuous, we also should never despair. Christ is present; Christ will come in glory. To translate this into our terms, we are called to live lives of confidence that tomorrow can and will be better than today.

Third, we are called to be life giving. If we are joyful, optimistic, and loving, we will be life-giving. Since most of us are not tax collectors or soldiers, John’s words to the crowds are most appropriate for us: “*Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.*” Christians are a people of love. Paul wrote to the Philippians: “*Your kindness should be known to all.*”

What prompted me to talk about this today is something I have been thinking about for several weeks. As I mentioned last Sunday, people’s lives are complicated and messy. People’s relationships are complicated and messy. Most people struggle at various times in their lives. There are ups and downs, highs and lows. Sometimes the Christmas season brings out all the complexity and messiness of our lives and relationships.

One of St. Paul’s constant themes is that we should support one another in faith, hope, and love. When Christians come together to celebrate Eucharist or serve the needs of others, they bring joy, optimism, and life to those who are struggling. When young people tell me that they get nothing out of Mass, I always make the point that their youth and vitality are a great gift to a community and especially to all those who are burdened.

My brothers and sisters, St. Paul wrote, “*In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love*” [I Cor. 13:13]. If we put it all together, we come to understand that faith leads to joy, hope leads to optimism, and love is life-giving.