

Sermon for Sunday, Week 3, Advent – Year C

2021

1st Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18

2nd Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

First. Rejoicing with the Lord.

“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord”, says St. Paul.

Why? Because “great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel”.

When the Lord is in our midst, we have every reason to be happy.

You’ve probably had the experience of having a close friend, or a family member, whose presence makes you happy. When that person’s with you, you feel like you can face anything – no problem will be too much for you, buoyed up as you are by that person’s encouragement and the joy they bring you.

It should be like that with the Lord.

He is good and kind, full of life, and powerful. What problem can’t the Almighty fix?

But perhaps the most amazing thing about the Lord’s friendship is that He is overjoyed at being *our* friend.

Zephaniah says it. Not only will He “renew you by his love”, He will also “exult with joy over you” and “dance with shouts of joy for you as on a day of festival”.

So let us be happy in His presence, and make Him happy.

Second. The Holy One is in our midst. The Sunday Obligation.

For the Holy One is “in your midst”.

To be happy with the Lord, we need to be... well, precisely, *with* the Lord.

***Where* is the Lord?**

He is **everywhere**, of course.

But **in a special way He is in the Eucharist, in the other Sacraments, and in the community of believers** that make up the Church.

You have heard that the Bishops are about to restore the normal **obligation to attend Mass on Sundays**.

It’s an obligation that **binds gravely** – as theologians say.

That means if we don’t **take it seriously** we commit a sin.

And **if, without a serious excuse, we fail to come to Mass, we commit a sin. Since the obligation is ‘serious’, the sin is ‘serious’ too.**

Someone might think: “Since God is everywhere, I can worship Him just as well at home”.

These people should remember the exhortation of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some**, but encouraging one another” (10:24-25).

We all need encouragement and support.

And if the Church, as St. Paul says, is the Body of Christ, then not participating in her public worship is like a part of the body being cut off.

Jesus said, if you remember, “**apart from me you can do nothing**” (Jn 15:5b).

Of course, some people are **truly not able to come to Mass** for serious and solid reasons. **These people are not cut off from the Body of Christ if their heart is truly with Christ and His Church.**

Third. Love and prayer.

St. Luke tells us that John the Baptist announced to the people the “**good news**”.

Today is Gaudete Sunday – a moment of joyful anticipation of the coming of our Lord. And soon we will hear the angels singing over the plains of Bethlehem, and saying to the shepherds, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy” (Lk 2:10).

Every Sunday should be a moment of joyful encounter with God.

We must not look upon Sunday Mass as just an obligation to be fulfilled. If we did that, we would perhaps be like that servant whom the Master rebuked upon his return because he had only buried his talent in the ground and hadn’t used in a profitable way:

“Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow”

– ‘*requiring us to go to Mass on Sunday, even though life is difficult enough already*’ –

²⁵ “so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’

²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful [lazy] servant!’” (Mt 25:24-26).

At the end of the day, Jesus, His message and the religion founded by Him, is all about *love*.

Love can never be forced.

Obligations school and tutor – they can’t force love from us.

If we don’t *want* to love God, we won’t love Him.

Thankfully, Jesus doesn’t give up so easily.

As long as there is life and breath in us, He *invites us* to grow warm with that “fire” of which John the Baptist spoke in our gospel reading today.

He invites us to rejoice in His friendship now so that we might experience the delights of it in eternity.

Regular, serious prayer is the key to all this – because only through prayer do we perceive that God is delightful and really begin to desire to go to Him, to journey with Him, to become all that He wants us to be.

May this blessing be ours indeed, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, our Mother and Advocate of grace (cf. Preface, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception).

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

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