

Third Sunday of Advent

Those beautiful words from the first reading: “The Lord, your God, is in your midst; he will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love, he will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.”

Responsorial Psalm: Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice! The Lord is near.”

What great readings we have today. Zephaniah is shouting for joy. The psalmist sings with gladness. Paul rejoices twice. I can't help but think of a picture my mom has called the “Smiling Jesus.” It has always touched me. Looking at the picture you see Jesus smiling at you. So what is all the joy about today during this Advent season. Simply: it is about hope.

Truly great people are those who have learned one great lesson. Hope can never be silenced. For anyone who believes in God, in a power greater than self, greater than this world, hope will always break out. For the energy of Hope is an irrepressible, undeniable force. As St. Paul said: “In him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything.”

The more life presses us and the world stresses us, and the heaviest of burdens weighs us down, the more our God reminds us: “I will be with you always, even until the end of time.” So Advent is not simply a season; the whole of life is an Advent. We are waiting expectantly for something that in some sense is already here.

I cannot help but think of Loris Buccola and his great line: “ALS is deadly but not serious.” He meant that in some way ALS taught him that Advent is a way of life and so he was filled with hope. I want to quote from his reflection from his book that he wrote for Advent. “Now we see Advent as a time of expectation that something great is about to happen, of God about to come into our lives in a new and wonderful way. We trust beyond even reasonable hope that all suffering is

temporary, that the cloak of fear and mourning will be replaced with clothing of celebration.”

So Hope lies not in the absence of problems, but in the presence of peace within. Having Hope does not mean having no problems or worries. Rather, having hope means knowing and believing with every fiber of our being that what we have is greater than what we lack. As St. Paul says:

“The Lord himself is near...dismiss all anxiety from your minds.”

Cardinal Suenens, a great writer and speaker at the Second Vatican Council said: “I am a man of hope, not for human reasons nor from any natural optimism. But because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church and the world. To those who welcome him he gives a renewed joy and hope. I believe in the surprises of the Holy Spirit. To hope is a duty, not a luxury.”

So what are you worried about? What is pulling down your spirit? “Dismiss all anxiety from your minds.”

What personal weakness obsesses you? What perceived deficiency holds you back?

“The Lord himself is near you.”

Send away your fears. Dismiss your distress and dread. Seek a Source of Power and Peace beyond this plane of existence. Hope can never be silenced.

Never give up on God!

Never give up on yourself!

God sings joyfully because of you. He rejoices over you. He has baptized you with the Holy Spirit and you are his special possession.