

DECEMBER 16, 2018

Third Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 [ZEP 3:14-18A](#)

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
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 [IS 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.](#)

R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Reading 2 [PHIL 4:4-7](#)

Gospel [LK 3:10-18](#)

HOMILY

One of the saddest people that I recall across my nearly 28 years as a priest was a man in a nursing home near my first parish assignment at St. Matthew in Cedar Rapids. I saw him only for maybe 10 seconds, but he still haunts me. I was in a hurry to visit a parishioner who was in need of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, as she was approaching death. This man was wandering the hall, clearly burdened by the onset of the memory-robbing disease of Alzheimer's. But—my mission was to the parishioner and so he quickly passed from my notice. After administering the healing sacrament of the Anointing, and having “gotten there in time,” I relaxed a bit and headed back towards the parking lot, when this man appeared in my path and seeing my priestly appearance, his face filled with anxiety. His eyes began to fill with tears and began to repeat, loudly and sadly, “three Hail Marys!” “three hail Marys!”, “three Hail Marys!” Apparently, he still had some vivid use of memory, the memory of penances still uncompleted. As you know, in the sacrament of Confession, following the reception of forgiveness through sacramental absolution, a penance is received as a spiritual act to express sorrow for one's failings and a desire to make up for one's failings, to complete the act of receiving forgiveness. This sad, afflicted man, robbed of his memory control, was not robbed, sadly, of these memories. And the memory that I triggered, as a priest, was one of still being burdened with sin. I don't know what that unforgiven burden was (he himself probably couldn't remember the exact

failings), but it was clear that he had practiced a long life of guilt for his sins, was still burdened and not at peace. Sadly, it seemed like that would be his state until the end of his life.

Are you likewise burdened? You don't look like it! Looking around, it seems like everyone is okay. You've all gotten out of bed, gotten dressed, washed your faces, brushed your teeth, and now sit here, ready for Mass. And yet, this does not mean there are no burdens. For we are very good at putting on appearances, putting on a "good face," functioning and surviving, aren't we? But—are we really surviving? Furthermore, as the man in the nursing home showed, might these "bearable" burdens become unbearable and slowly squeeze the life out of us? If we're not careful, they could weigh us down to the end.

The radiant Advent message of the coming of a Savior is perfectly expressed in the words of the ancient prophet Zephaniah, who opens up the merciful heart of God for us to see when he says,

“The LORD has removed the judgment against you he has turned away your enemies. .
.The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love.”

He will remove the judgment against you and me, a judgment that is, most always, self-imposed. But not until we choose to come to the Savior and lay down our burdens.

Is this the message for you, this year, this Advent, finally this Advent? Can you come the Lord, ask Him to remove the judgment that you (or others!) have imposed on your spirit, and, as a Savior, and then renew you in His love? Of will you hold on to these burdens, ancient and new, these most toxic companions? We are meant to rise up, rise up from our anxieties and burdens, rise up from our failings, rise up from our guilt and regrets, rise up to the Glory of children renewed in God's love, renewed in spirit, renewed in life. Come, lay down your burdens, your life-strangling burdens, carry them no longer, and let him carry you! We have been created for more. Before we carry these burdens one second more, or, God forbid, carry them to the end of our lives, let us come to mercy and be relieved, freed, and restored to life. This is the reason we come here to rejoice.