

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT, DECEMBER 13, 2015 – “What should we do”?

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love.” Zephaniah

READINGS: Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-3,4,5-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

The readings today open with great celebration drawing us to remember that the “Lord is in our midst” and indeed he sings joyfully because of us. As we move from the prophet Zephaniah to St. Luke we come to understand better that our rejoicing is tied to our service to the human community as well as by our willing witness to the Lord. The first reading and the responsorial psalm remind us that we gain confidence, fear is banished, and courage prevails when we make “known and acclaim his name throughout all the earth”. Paul, in Philippians, gives an insistent but simple and clear directive linking joy with charity: “Rejoice in the Lord. I shall say it again, rejoice! Your kindness should be known by all.”

The tone and focus of the readings change as the crowds press the last Old Testament prophet who humbly acknowledges that “one mightier is coming”. With great simplicity and with little concern for the reactions he might stir up, John the Baptist offers a general and then individualized responses to the various sectors as they seek a response to their question: “Teacher, what should we do?” In the first general response to the group, John speaks of the care of the neighbor, the corporal works of mercy sharing one’s clothing and food with those in need. Then he responds specifically to the tax collectors and the soldiers, warning them of those practices within their work situations that violate justice. Then John turns poetic offering a salvation metaphor with assurance that “the One mightier than I” will be coming and “he will clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

REFLECTION and ACTION: The readings of this Third Sunday of Advent remind us that despite the current turmoil within our world and the many divisions that are threatening humanity, we have much to rejoice over as followers of Jesus. We also are reminded that we must rejoice in the Lord, sharing His joy in Gospel service and witness of love for all. Imagine yourself in the crowd with John the Baptist and pray the question WHAT SHOULD I DO? Listen carefully!

PRAYER: Gracious God, I rejoice that You have called me to be a witness to your Life and to the Gospel. I pray that you will help me to see you in the events and the people of my everyday life so that my behavior will match my trust that you do indeed live in our midst. I want to be an instrument of peace and joy in my family and with my associates and neighbors. May I, like John the Baptist, not fear the criticism of others who reject or mock my faith. Help me to rejoice as I wait with Mary to celebrate your presence among us and give me the humility and courage to speak of your goodness and love for all.