

HOMILY for 3rd SUNDAY of ADVENT – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about being kind and generous to the people around us as a way to prepare for the coming of our Lord. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A lawyer is painting his house, & a hobo comes around & asks if he can do something to earn a few dollars. The lawyer feels sympathetic to the poor man & says, "Sure, take a can of this paint & go around to the back of the house & paint my porch."

The hobo does this & fifteen minutes later comes back & says he's finished. The lawyer says, "Done already?"

And the hobo says, "Yeah, but it isn't a Porsche, it's a Mercedes!"

Anyway, as we commemorate the First Christmas & prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus, John the Baptist/a herald's voice in the desert cries out, "Make ready the way of the Lord, clear Him a straight path. Every valley shall be filled & every mountain & hill shall be leveled. The windings shall be made straight & the rough ways smooth; & all mankind shall see the salvation of God." In other words, John calls us to make straight the way of the Lord & smooth out any wrinkles in our lives for His sake. He invites us to begin a spiritual conversion & building a good relationship with God & repairing any cracks in the relationships with people around us. But, that might be too abstract for us to understand & start a spiritual conversion this Advent. We need to do some concrete things to make that whole conversion happen this season. So, what must we do to achieve a spiritual conversion this Advent?

This Sunday's Gospel gives us the answer for that question as following, "...In reply John said, 'Let the person with two coats give to the one who has none. The person who has food should do the same.' Tax collectors also came to be baptized & said, 'Teacher, what are we to do?' John answered them, 'Exact nothing over & above your assigned amount.' Soldiers likewise asked him, 'What about us?' John told them, 'Do not bully anyone. Denounce no one falsely. Be content with your pay.'...Using exhortations of this sort, John preached the good news to the people." Evidently John has been able to give us concrete examples on how to take on a spiritual conversion this Advent.

First, John asks us to share God's blessings to us with the misfortunate around us. If we have two coats, we need to give one of them to the one who has none. If we have lots of food, we are asked to share some of it with the one who has none. That is exactly what we do every Advent with the Angel-Giving-Tree program for some of the needy children in the local area. Besides that program, we are called to give to various charities during Christmas time. That spirit of kindness & generosity is what we should live by throughout the year in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Unfortunately, we live in a selfish & greedy society. Our political leaders would usually befriend with the filthy rich & let them pay very little tax for their enormous possessions. On the contrary, they make ordinary citizens like us pay a huge tax portion on our little income & cut lots of daily benefits for the poor & social outcast. John certainly wants to invite our political leaders & wealthy citizens to enter the Advent spirit & try to share God's blessings to them with the whole society, especially the poor & social outcast.

Lastly, John called on the people of God to carry on their daily jobs with dignity & gratitude. He asked tax collectors not to demand the people more than their fair share of taxes & soldiers not to use their power to extort money from the people. Instead, they should turn

away from their bad habits & corrupted practices if they would like to prepare the way for the Lord & welcome Him. By calling on those powerful people in Israel to turn away from their bad practices, John certainly would like the whole society to change its way of life & embrace the life of Christ. That is how John believed that they would truly prepare for the coming of Christ in concrete & personal ways. He would want the powerful & the rich to stop abusing their privileges & exploiting the poor & the lowly for their benefits & ambitions. He would call on them to avoid a life of sins & darkness & embrace the one of virtues & light. So, what must we do to get ourselves ready for the Second Coming of Christ?

I wrote on our Church Bulletin at the beginning of Advent Season that the Holy Father would open the doors of the Vatican on December 24, 2024 to welcome pilgrims to the Eternal City & kick off the Jubilee (50th) Year of Hope. The people of God who were driven into a life of slavery & had to face an uncertain future asked for a Messiah who would bring them a new life of freedom & a bright future asked for a Messiah who would bring them a new life of freedom & a bright future. Two thousand years later, we might not suffer the same fate like they did. But, we are facing lots of daily challenges & an uncertain future. We cannot count on most of our political & religious leaders to be a good role model for us. Some of us might even feel discouraged & despondent as we look out into a world full of hatred & anger these days. Everyone is filled with grievances against their neighbors & ready to hurt or do harm to people around them. Our Church & society is greatly divided & stuck in its own ways. No one wants to change & be willing to build a loving & peaceful community anymore. Our political & religious leaders do not have the kind, generous, & forgiving spirit of Christ/the coming Messiah like John the Baptist would want them to. Instead, they like to exploit the deep division in our Church & society for their own benefits & ambitions & continue to stir up hatred & anger every day. This Sunday, John the Baptist calls on them & all of us to embrace the new life of Christ & be extra kind & generous to the world. In fact, the Holy Father & our Diocese call us to join in the hopeful spirit of the Jubilee Year & be the messenger of hope throughout the New Year. I would personally ask you to do one kind, good deed a week for the whole year 2025 to bring hope & positive change to our world.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Third Sunday of Advent is often called "Gaudette" Sunday, meaning "Rejoice" because the coming of our Lord is near. Today's First Reading highlights that message for us like this, "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad & exult with all your heart, o daughter Jerusalem! ...The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; He will rejoice over you with gladness, & renew you in His love; He will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals." Meanwhile, today's Second Reading echoes that same message as the following, "Brothers & sisters, rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near." As you can see, we are called to rejoice & be kind to others as the best way to prepare for the coming of our Lord. With His blessing & guidance, we all can bring positive change to our Church & society & build a loving & peaceful community for us & the next generations.