



December 14, 2014

Third Sunday of Advent—Gaudete/Rejoice Sunday

“For as the earth brings forth its shoots; and as a garden causes what is sown to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.” Isaiah 61:11

Dear Friends;

The scriptures today indicate that the wilderness and nature have something to teach us: hope, regeneration and rebirth. John is in the wilderness to protest the injustice of his society. He is saying the whole of society has to start over. A son of a simple rural priest John would have seen firsthand the injustice—the extreme wealth of the top percent of society and the extreme poverty of the remaining people.

John’s baptisms are a protest. He is baptizing at the place where Israel first entered into the land of the promise. He is saying we need to get back to the radical equality that our people had at the beginning—when God was ruler and we were all equal children of Israel. John is someone who wants to point us in the direction of the light so we can recognize the One sent by God. The first step is to turn away from the sins that enable injustice to thrive. The Jerusalem elite are questioning John not because they want to believe his message but to see how much of a threat he poses.

Pope Francis, like John the Baptist, urges us in new directions which we are free to accept or ignore. First he invites us to reject an economic system of exclusion. “To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal” makes us indifferent. “We end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor...they fail to move us.” The next thing the pope urges us to say no to is the idolatry of money—this is expressed in a system that only looks to money and profit as the measure of all value. He says, “Money must serve, not rule. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings.”

It is inequality which begets violence. Pope Francis points out “when a society...is content to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility.” John the Baptist and Pope Francis have set us on a path to cultivate a new kind of society built on the values of God’s coming Reign.

Isaiah is speaking to a people who have already experienced the consequences of injustice. They have known the collapse of their society. Then conquered by the Babylonians they were held in exile for about seventy years. Now looking forward to their freedom the prophet speaks to them words of comfort and hope. They will rebuild their society based on the Covenant of God’s compassionate love.

Like shoots that come out of the barren ground a new world will be born: out of the ashes flowers; oil to soothe the skin; comfort for the weak; a mantle of courage to wrap around the faint of heart. The people will be blessed with a new status; they will be planting for a new day. With their new status comes the responsibility to rebuild a new a just society for all. Out of the ruins of a society built on money, violence, coercion, torture and war we are to pave the way to a world built on love. This new world is inevitable just as spring follows winter. I would like to conclude with a poem by **Lucille Clifton** called *Spring Song*:

the green of Jesus
is breaking the ground
and the sweet
smell of delicious Jesus
is opening the house and
the dance of Jesus music
has hold of the air and
the world is turning
in the body of Jesus and
the future is possible.

Peace,

Fr Ron