

December 17, 2006

Third Sunday of Advent

Reading I (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.

God indeed is my savior;
I am confident and unafraid.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.

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

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.

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

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious
achievement;
let this be known throughout all the earth.
Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

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

Reading II (Phil 4:4-7)

Brothers and sisters:
Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again: rejoice!
Your kindness should be known to all.
The Lord is near.
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all
understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Gospel (Lk 3:10-18)

The crowds asked John the Baptist,
“What should we do?”
He said to them in reply,
“Whoever has two cloaks
should share with the person who has none.
And whoever has food should do likewise.”
Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they
said to him,

“Teacher, what should we do?”
He answered them,
“Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.”
Soldiers also asked him,
“And what is it that we should do?”
He told them,
“Do not practice extortion,
do not falsely accuse anyone,
and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.
John answered them all, saying,
“I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his
threshing floor
and to gather the wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”
Exhorting them in many other ways,
he preached good news to the people.

After a long day of work, I was on my way to dinner at my brother's house. He's happily married, and has a wonderful wife, and three great kids. I pulled up into the driveway and parked my truck. As I walked up to the house, I saw a note taped to the front door that said, "David, come in." So, I opened the door, and said "Hello!" Immediately three little voices cheered and the patter of running feet came into the foyer. The oldest was the first to see me. And she stopped. Abruptly. Her face sort of fell, and she turned around to her little brother and little sister and said, "Never mind, it's not Daddy." And, then almost as an afterthought said, "Oh ... Hi Uncle David," as they walked back to the family room.

Growing up, my brother had always prided himself on his musical IN-ability. He would proudly tell me that he really DID play an instrument – the radio. And he'd point out that playing the radio was a lot less work than music lessons.

But do you know that the first time I heard my brother singing was right after his first child was born. He was holding her in his arms and singing to her. My non-musical brother was singing to his baby daughter.

This is the idea in the reading from Zephaniah – (a name that means "Yahweh has treasured.")

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
...
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.

In this reading, we hear that the people of God (1) shout for joy, (2) sing joyfully, (3) are glad, and (4) exult. Do you know that exult means to hop? Jump for joy. What is with these people? Why are they doing this? Because GOD IS IN THEIR MIDST. And what does God do? He's not smacking them down. He (1) rejoices with (2) gladness, (3) renews them in his love, and (4) sings joyfully because of them.

Now, I want to tell you a secret. You know what? GOD IS REJOICING OVER US. GOD IS RENEWING US IN HIS LOVE. GOD IS SINGING JOYFULLY BECAUSE OF US.

WE ARE GOD'S TREASURE. WE ARE THE FULFILLMENT OF THIS PROPHECY!
REJOICE! REJOICE! JUMP – FOR – JOY!

God is singing to us like a parent singing to a newborn child. And how do we respond to this?

WE NEED TO REJOICE IN GOD. ALWAYS. AT ALL TIMES, AND IN ALL PLACES. REJOICE.

St. Paul knew that. When he was writing the Letter to the Philippians, he was in jail. A first century jail is not a place that lends itself to rejoicing. But St. Paul's words to the Church in Philippi on the outside of that jail are REJOICE. REJOICE. Why? BECAUSE THE LORD IS NEAR.

THE LORD IS NEAR. THE LORD IS IN OUR MIDST.

Where is the Lord? In the Word we just heard. In the People of God sitting next to you. In the guy you cut off to get to church on time. In the Sacred Banquet we are about to participate in. GOD – IS – HERE! GOD – IS – IN – OUR – MIDST! J-U-M-P – F-O-R – J-O-Y-!

R-E-J-O-I-C-E-!