

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent December 17, 2017 Fr. Thomas Joseph

The last century has been littered with people who have claimed to have all the answers to the great human questions and human problems. The great dictators: Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Mao – who all knew what the world needed and left a trail of destruction in their wake.

Then there were dictators who had all the answers and were prepared to put up with any amount of suffering to impose their expert solutions.

And then the experts in personal affairs came in to the scene: telling us how we should live our lives or how to be successful or become happy in ten lessons. All we must do is buy their book or video and follow the instructions.

Currently, there are many books that tells us how to have the perfect Christmas, or Christmas party, or perfect Christmas cooking! All these experts have something in common: look to me and I will solve your problems. And, of course, there is no shortage of religious experts of every make and shape who have a sure-fire, quick and simple route to happiness and bliss.

Faced with such experts, many of us instinctively retreat for there is something deep inside us that says it cannot be as simple as that. Life is always more complex than the clarity offered in the various expert solutions. On the other hand, many of us faced with the complexity of the world and its problems long for a simple solution that will deliver security, clarity, and happiness. The experts all have disciples or people at least willing to listen to them or buy their books: and that is their success.

John the Baptist is not such an expert. His vocation is to point away from himself to the Lamb. Here the focus is changed. He is the witness to the truth, not its possessor. He is the way-maker, not the way. John the Baptist was also faced with both those who would discredit him as another religious fraud, or those who would adopt him as their savior and leader. But

he made clear: 'I am not the Christ ... but among you stands one whom you do not know ... who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'

Here lies the style of the witness of everyone who recognizes the Christ: we point away from ourselves and towards the One who is to come, the One who brings the universe to its completion.

According to St. John's gospel, Jesus is the way and that way begins in a wilderness. And, while the way of Jesus ends in triumph, that triumph is the cry 'It is completed' upon the cross. As John the Baptist pointed beyond himself and bore witness to the Christ, the Christ points beyond himself and bears witness to the Father (Jn. 5:33-36). Jesus, the Anointed One does not invite us to adopt a set of answers, much less sure-success remedies to life's problems, but He does invite us to embark on his way, to adopt his style, and to begin that journey from the midst of whatever wilderness we inhabit.

His way is the way of justice, gentleness, peace, and integrity. The Anointed One, the Christ, fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, and commends it to his followers as their way. For the spirit of the Lord has been given to us, we have been anointed so that we are made part of the whole Christ.

This Sunday is Gaudete Sunday, Rejoice Sunday. "Brothers and sisters," St. Paul says in the second reading, "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus....May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it."

Rejoice, this Sunday tells us. The Rose vestments remind us that this is a time of great expectations. We have every reason to be full of joy. Rejoice, Christmas is almost here. *Rejoice, not so much that we have found Christ, but rejoice that He has found us.*

There are certainly times that each of us feel lost. There are times that we feel alone. But we are not lost. He has found us. We are not alone. He is with us. With Jesus in our lives, the crises we face become challenges, but not devastating events. A loved one becomes sick, or even dies. We become sick and receive the diagnosis that our condition is terminal. A marriage falls

apart. A job is lost. A friend is lost. Whatever the crisis, we know that the final result will be union with God. Jesus is with us always, particularly in the worst of our times.

Some years ago, our late Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II, told the youth of the world to be attune to the presence of Christ in their inmost desires. His words were meant for all of us: *“It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else ever satisfies you. He is the beauty to which you are so attracted. It is He who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise. It is He that urges you to shed the masks of a false life. It is He who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs up in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.”*

Jesus is there. He has found us. Now, the whole focus of our lives has changed. With Jesus in our lives, we are mature adults, living in His Love.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.

As Christian to the heart of our being, we also proclaim these words from our first reading which Jesus Himself read in the Synagogue of Nazareth. We are anointed by God. We are baptized. And we are sent. We are sent to bring joy to the world. We are to bring glad tidings to the poor, news that God knows their plight and will care for them through His people here on earth, the Church. We are to tell the broken hearted that God hears their cries. If they are mourning the loss of a loved one, they need to hear that the Lord has conquered death and that those who have let Him into their lives will live with Him forever. If their hearts are broken by events beyond their control, the loss of a job, the loss of a marriage, or any series of events that make them feel abandoned by the world, alone in society, they need to know that Jesus is the Mender of Broken Hearts. If they are held captive by others, or perhaps by their own addictions,

they need to know that Jesus provides freedom and liberty. They do not have to spend the rest of their lives as victims of society. With Jesus they can be victors, not victims.

It is up to us to lead people to the victory of Jesus Christ. We do this by sharing our joy with them. *"I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul."* I was lost, but now I am found. We were all lost, but He found us. His Grace is Amazing. And let us rejoice.