

## Third Sunday of Advent (C)

December 16, 2018

Zephaniah 3:14-18

Isaiah 12: 2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

On this Third Sunday of Advent when the prophet John the Baptist is front and center in the gospel, I want to share with you a more recent, some what current prophet, Oscar Romero. He was the Archbishop of San Salvador when he was murdered while celebrating Mass in March 1980. He wrote in *The Violence of Love*:

*We bishops, popes, priests, nuns, Catholic educators—  
we are human, and as humans we are sinful  
and we need someone to be a prophet for us too  
and call us to conversion  
and not let us set up religion  
as something untouchable.*

*Religion needs prophets, and thank God we have them,  
because it would be a sad church  
that felt itself owner of the truth  
and rejected every thing else.*

*A church that only condemns,  
a church that sees sin only in others  
and does not look at the beam in its own eye,  
is not the authentic church of Christ.*

This Sunday, the sacred word begins with the exhortation, "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!" And the apostle Paul follows, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!" These lessons lead us into the gospel passage where we are invited to ponder what is it that brings the heart to a place where one can rejoice. I mentioned last week that John the Baptist was more of a mystic rather than a moralist. A moralist is one who helps move us toward what is right, good, and just. A mystic does the very same thing but urges us to go deeper, that the outward behavior might flow from an inner conviction. Our outward behavior will only be genuine when we have been able to make a connection deep within the heart and soul. We might be prodded to act in a certain way but if it does not somehow come from deep within, the action will not be genuine and soon abandoned.

As far as we know John was pretty much in the wilderness, the desert, until he was inspired, called, compelled to start preaching around the Jordan. This was the place of intersection where Israel ended their long journey from exile and entered the promised land. John caught the attention of the people, he touched some thing deep within them, and they genuinely responded, "What should we do?" He responded to the poor person

surviving from day to day, “share that extra cloak with the one who has none and do the same with your food.” Moving up the social ladder, tax collectors and soldiers also came out to John. Apparently, they were taken by John, moved by his preaching, that they felt they must also inquire, “What should we do?” He gave them simple and practical suggestions, “begin to do the right thing.” I would say they were touched deeply, because they recognized John is the sure thing, he is authentic. He did everything he demanded of others and more. He knew who he was and did not claim to be anything more. And so, the people could not help but wonder “whether John might be the Christ.”

In the opening lesson, Zephaniah paints the hopeful picture of a God who longs to forgive and rejoices over the people. The apostle Paul and the psalm offer the hope that comes from believing that the Lord is active among the people and soon to be more fully present. And what John offers is the hope of a transformed world that will come about through people who do what is right, good, and just. And so, on this Sunday of Advent, something is expected of you and me.

I would like to return to Archbishop Romero. The night before he gave his life, he said on the radio: “I would like to appeal in a special way to the men of the army, and in particular to the troops of the National Guard, the police, and the garrisons. Brothers, you belong to our own people. You kill your own brother peasants; and in the face of an order to kill that is given by a man, the law of God that says ‘Do not kill!’ should prevail. No soldier is obliged to obey an order counter to the law of God. No one has to comply with an immoral law.” (Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Saint of the Day, March 24, Franciscan Media).

It is a costly thing to bring Christ Jesus to birth in this troubled world. Yet, it is the only way for us be authentic and genuine.

Having pondered the sacred word, we receive Christ in Eucharist. We go into the new week with the grace of God to help us become *the authentic church of Christ*.