

Homily - Advent 3 - C - December 16, 2018

We just heard in our first reading: Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult. Soon, at Christmas, we will sing: Joy to the world. The Lord has come.

Advent is truly a season to prepare for joy, even to express joy. After all, no matter what may be voiced outside of church, we are about to celebrate the birth of our Savior, God become man.

Simon and Garfunkel, The Seekers, The Chad Mitchell Trio, and many others captured this joy when they recorded the African American spiritual about Jesus coming into the world that has these profound but simple words: Well, you can tell the world about this; you can tell the nations about that; Tell 'em what the Master has done; tell 'em that the gospel has come; Tell 'em that the victory has been won; he brought joy, joy, joy, joy, joy into my heart!

We often hear people tell stories about the meaning of Christmas that end up with the phrase: "That's what Christmas is all about." That may be true as long as in some way we recognize that ultimately it is Jesus who brings joy, joy, joy into our hearts. Any Christmas joy, any holiday cheer, any Christ spirit that is not somehow rooted in the fundamental joy that Christ brings to our lives is only imitation joy.

This Sunday is traditionally called *Gaudete Sunday* because of the overriding theme of joy expressed in the readings. There is joy in the prophecy, words of joy from Paul because of the great gift given to us by Jesus.

The joy, rooted in Jesus, finds its fulfillment in the forgiveness of our sins. Certainly that joy is renewed each time we approach the sacrament of reconciliation. The forgiveness of our sins first began at Baptism with the removal of original sin and continues each time we pray, offer good works. And that forgiveness of sin is guaranteed in the Sacrament of Penance.

Our reasons for joy do not stop at the forgiveness of sins. Part of the Good News, the "gospel has come" as we hear in the African American Spiritual, gives us a different vision of life, our lives that have a greater purpose than just living. Of course, we believe in heaven as our ultimate destiny. Our vision is that our lives, once begun, continue on into eternity.

Our Christian vision of life is fulfilled in eternal life. But, we are very much grounded here on earth. In our earthly existence, the Good News of

Jesus gives us a vision of the human person beyond any other vision. We are called to greatness because of God's love for us. We are called to exercise that greatness even here on earth.

Of course, all of this gets shattered when we hear about events such as random shootings based on hatred. Nothing can explain such tragedies that affect the core of human life and human potential. The destruction of human life is the exact opposite of Christ's message that should cause joy in our lives. Christ calls us to so much more. That is why we are gifted with life in the first place.

So, we know that our vocation is a call to greatness in Christ. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the author of life, we pray that we may all recognize the greatness and beauty of the life God has given us and that we may always protect human life, both born and unborn. The joy that we should experience at this time of the year is the joy given to us by God himself in human life, a life that has been exalted and raised up through Jesus Christ. Because of Christ, our joy is not restricted to one day but to life itself