

Sunday December 13, 2020

Third Week of Advent Reflection

By: Paul Legace

On this Third Sunday of Advent the theme is about preparation for the birth of Christ. How can we change our behavior? How can we straighten the road we are on in life, and remove the obstacles that prevent us from appreciating and rejoicing at the birth of Jesus? The readings and the gospel provide us with much food for thought regarding these questions.

In the first reading from the Old Testament the courageous prophet Isaiah speaks to his people and to us today. Isaiah is speaking to the majority of his people who are enslaved and a number who are free to trust in the Lord over two thousand years ago. Isaiah the anointed one is sent to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken hearted and liberty to the captives. His message to the people of Israel over two thousand years ago is also very relevant for us in 2020. Many of us are oppressed with the pervasiveness of COVID-19. The pandemic has brought our world to a grinding halt. Unemployment, uncertainty and despair are the constant themes. Many are confined, locked down in retirement homes and apartments, literally prisoners in their own homes. How many of us are prisoners to greed, fame and our own selfishness? Where can we find hope? Isaiah's message is one of hope, trust in the Lord. God will not abandon us! Hope is also on the horizon with possible vaccines that will protect us from COVID-19. We Christians cannot be passive bystanders during this time of upheaval. We're called to action, to bring hope to a dark and despairing world.

In the second reading Saint Paul addresses the Christian community in Thessalonica Greece, around 50 CE. He encourages them to pray always, have a grateful heart; God will be faithful and answer your prayers. Paul tells them not to lose heart but keep the Spirit alive within you. Act justly and abstain from every form of evil. St. Paul's words should resonate with us today as well. We can be grateful for all the benefits of living in Canada. Rather than focus on what we don't have focus on what we do have. We live in a beautiful country that cherishes freedom, democracy and the rule of law. We're not experiencing a civil war, famine, or trying to eke out a life in a refugee camp. There are employment opportunities in many fields that are booming during this pandemic. We have a social safety net that our governments have expanded during this crisis. Our

families, friends, and colleagues can provide us with much needed social contact via the telephone, and internet during these times of isolation. Taking stock of all we have can give us a measure of peace in the Lord. We must continue to pray to our Lord and not lose heart.

The gospel this week is taken from John 1.6-8, 19-28. John the Baptist is sent by God to proclaim to others the light of Christ. This approaching light would overcome all darkness. When questioned by the Jewish authorities as to who he was, John declares, "I am not the Messiah." He says, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the Prophet Isaiah said. How can we today in 2020 make straight the way of the Lord? What can I do in my life to prepare my heart and mind for the birth of Christ? Our world today can obstruct our relationship with Christ by placing many mountains and valleys before us. Our society promotes the individual and independence rather than community and interdependence. Am I open to the needs of the poor and downtrodden around me or too caught up in the pursuit of wealth and my own desires? Racism and hatred are daily experiences for many in our community rather than respect, acceptance and tolerance. Do I harbour any feelings of prejudice based on ignorance or fear? Consumerism surrounds us. Can we live a more simple life focused on Christ rather than materialism? The natural world can be a tremendous medium to experience the majesty and love of God. Climate change is occurring at a rapid pace. How can we be stewards of creation rather than exploiters? There is much one can do if one contemplates upon the gospel thoughtfully.

The gospel message also calls us to reflect upon our own personal lives. How can I improve my relationship with Christ and be more receptive to the message of Christmas? How do I conduct myself amongst family and friends? Do I speak with a respectful tone and Christian diction? Do I make time for my family and friends especially those in need? Do I make time for reflection and prayer in my life? We are challenged to be grateful in the midst of this pandemic and all the chaos and uncertainty it has created. Do I seek out Christ to ask for guidance and solace? Lastly, can I share what I have with the less fortunate amongst us? This could be as simple as a donation to Share Life or a gift to the needy via the Jesse Tree located in our parish foyer. We can be agents of change and bring light to others and thus appreciate the true meaning of the birth of Emmanuel in our lives.

The readings on this Third Sunday of Advent offer us much to deliberate upon. How we act will impact our appreciation and understanding of the light that will soon be upon us. Let us build a community that overcomes the voices of greed, hatred and deception that surround us. Let us do all we can to love, share and build a better community here in Aurora and in the world around us.