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Third Sunday of Advent - 15 December 2024

Gerard Moore

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15 December 2024

Third Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

This third week of the season heralds a turn from an emphasis on the second coming of Christ to the impending feast of Christmas. It is the same in our homes. The children have finished school and are counting the days. The liturgy invites us to reflect on how the Good News touches us and converts us as we prepare for the celebration of the Light of the World.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you baptise us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Lord, have mercy.

You guide us when we are despairing. Christ, have mercy.

You show us the perfect example of love. Lord, have mercy.

Collect

*O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.*

The collect describes us as awaiting the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. Interestingly, the sixth-century original was slightly more theological, speaking of our expectation of the 'incarnation' rather than the 'birth'. For contemporary believers three images come to the fore here. The most profound is that of the incarnation: the divine one taking flesh and living as fully human. Following the patristic wisdom of St. Irenaeus, 'what is not taken up of our humanity cannot be saved'. The primary unpacking of the incarnation is that the saviour must be born to be of one flesh with us. From this flows the prayer's understanding of the 'nativity'. The term seeks to focus our attention on the full humanity of Jesus. However, uppermost in our consciousness today, following the piety of the medieval period, is the way we immediately equate the nativity with the actual birth of the child Jesus to Mary his mother in a stable in Bethlehem, angels, magi, animals and stars all included. While the birth of a child is always a cause of joy, and a safe birth under such conditions

well worth celebrating, the joy that underpins our worship and the rejoicing that can only be defined as solemn is because the divine took flesh and we have been offered salvation.

Collect commentary by Gerard Moore: The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by me for the Canadian liturgical journal Celebrate! (Novalis Press). My thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Zephaniah 3: 14-18a

The prophet Zephaniah, with a message of hope, is being applied to our Advent piety.

Responsorial Psalm

Isaiah 12:2-6. R. v.6

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

The psalm calls us to cry out because God is our salvation, our strength, our song.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice the Lord is near!

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:10-18

John the Baptist preaches the good news to the outcasts, encouraging them to see their expectations fulfilled in the one who is coming.

Reflection

This slightly diverse set of readings are being applied to our Advent piety. We start with the little-known prophet Zephaniah. Our passage is the closing section of the short book. It is a hopeful ending. The book itself is more concerned with divine wrath at false worship in Jerusalem. The setting is the tyranny of the great nations jostling for power (Egypt, Assyria, the Sythians) and the people of Israel in their midst making strategic and political alliances but forgetful of what constitutes true worship.

Perhaps a fruitful application for us is around the theme of hope. The prophet ends with hope despite his dire prophecies. In a typical ancient world fashion, the hope is in a leader to come. Here, we have the close application to Advent and the coming of the Lord. We do not live in a 'strong man' society or politic, though strong leadership of a democratic form is prized! Every day our news feeds speak of the dangers of

'strong men' and their violence-based rulership. However, our hope for the present situation may well be to call upon the gifts we already have in our midst as a Church, and to bring these to the fore.

In the scriptures the term 'true worship' has depth and resonance. It is more than appropriate celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments. It reflects the integrity of the life of the assembly. They must be true to God – true worship with heart and mind and soul – and true to the reign of God – love of neighbour as self.

The short excerpt from the Letter to the Philippians has a lovely balance. The Advent seasonal centrepiece is Paul's declaration that 'the Lord is near'. For young children, Christmas is a countable number of sleeps away. Yet the author does not place all in the future. The present is to be marked by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving and quieted hearts. This is the age of the good news, and the peace of Christ is already guarding the hearts of the faithful. This active faith is the setting for the hope in the imminent coming of Christ. It is our hope, too. Perhaps the sentiment that is most apposite for us comes early in the reading: 'your kindness should be known to all'. The impending coming of Christ as celebrated in Advent, or as understood by Paul to be a coming that was soon to be realised, is aimed to spur us to embody even more the good news here and now. Our communities should be renowned for their kindness.

The Gospel serves the season's theme with a further declaration of the 'adventing' of Christ. As we approach the feast of the inbreaking of the light, the Baptist is described as exhorting those who are listening to him to await Jesus. Still John is allowed something of his own flourish. As a prophet of repentance, he has an apocalyptic streak. The Christ will bring both the Holy Spirit and fire. The Spirit may be disruptive enough but there is a hard cleansing to come, a strong winnowing, a reckoning of sorts. This does not match the eventual preaching of Jesus, but Luke allows that John too preaches the good news.

In this preaching the Baptist is attractive to those on the outside of religious observance and good piety. Tax collectors, soldiers and other extortionists find hope with John, as do the poor. They are to be fed and clothed. There is much here that will be assumed into the preaching of Jesus.

For our liturgical setting, these characteristics mark who is to come. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, we are reminded of the qualities of the life of faith. John gives them an edge, but the Christian community needs to realise that its 'feet are being held to the fire' in our own circumstances. In an echo of the sermon on the plain, in this reading Luke is preparing us for the radical teachings of the beatitudes and the sermon that leads on from those blessings. As we await the celebration of the coming of the Good News, we are challenged by our readings and our immersion in the international environmental and political upheavals to ask whether we are good news to those around us. John reached beyond the usual restrictions to touch those considered beyond the bounds of God's love. As we are stretched, how well are we actually stretching to extend the bounds of God's love?

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The readings today exhort us to have hope and rejoice. Our true reason for rejoicing is that our God is a God who will lift us up and so we offer our needs and the needs of our world.

Petitions

Let us pray for our Church that it is a beacon like John the Baptist bringing hope to the poor and the suffering of our world.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for the leaders of our world. May their governance in economics, politics and education be directed towards the genuine needs of their people rather than conflict and power.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for all those who work in the food industry, from farm gate to table. May their efforts be rewarded with economic justice and respect from those they serve.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for those who work in education in Australia. May their efforts as they bring the academic year to a close be appreciated and acknowledged by those who they teach and their families.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for all those who are homeless and suffering as we lead into the festivities of Christmas. May they experience the compassion and joy of those who reach out to help.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for those who are dying in conflicts throughout the world. May the peace of Christ be brought to them through the efforts of agencies that we support.

(Pause) Lord hear us. OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of Peace, we offer you these petitions with knowledge that you are the great and Holy One who cares for us all. We pray in Jesus' name through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Third Sunday of Advent, Year C (15 December 2024)

Title	AOV	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
A voice cries out					278
Christmas is coming		55			
Fill ev'ry valley up		54			
Hark! a herald voice is calling				239	
In the Lord I'll be ever thankful				522	429
My soul in stillness waits					280
O come, O come Emmanuel	174		763	242	285
O Emmanuel		52			
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry			780	244	
Prepare the way			794	250	284
Prepare the way, O Zion				245	
Rejoice in the Lord always		75			
Rejoice, the Lord is king!			799	377	
Take comfort, God's people			813		
The Spirit of God				388	185
The voice of God				621	476
Wait for the Lord				251	283

Title	S&S2
Cry out with joy	289

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Isaiah 12: *Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.*

	CWB	JOBC	LPC
Isaiah 12	180	pg. 10	pg. 11

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Fill every valley (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]
 O Emmanuel (TT/SYJ/CWB II) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]
 Come, Lord Jesus, come CH & V3 (SYJ/ CWBII) [Lighting Advent Wreath]
 We come, we come (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]
 One body in Christ (TWB) [Communion – esp V2]
 Waiting for the child (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection - Gifts]