

Sunday, December 13, 2015

Third Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18

2nd Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Responsorial: (Psalm) Isaiah 12:2-6

Gospel: Luke 3: 10-18

Advent, A Time to Trust in Jesus and His Power and Strength

I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. (Luke 3:16)

If you've ever spent a lot of time in a mostly flat area, the sensation of driving up a steep hill and suddenly not being able to see the road ahead of you can be frightening—at least until you realize that there is more road after the hill crests! After a while, you get used to that feeling, but the sense of nervousness or excitement at the top never quite goes away.

This sensation can help us look at today's Gospel reading. When John the Baptist gave the people a road map for how they should act, it must have felt like a dead end to some of them. They wanted to follow his preaching, but they knew it would be hard to change their behaviors—and in some instances, their jobs—in order to live out the justice he had proclaimed.

It must have also felt like a dead end when John told the crowd that he wasn't the Messiah. You can imagine some wondering if they had been following the wrong person all along!

But John helped them see the magnificence of the road ahead by telling them that the Messiah was indeed coming—and that John, as great a prophet as he was, wasn't even fit to loosen the thong of his sandals.

Sometimes the road ahead looks a lot like a dead end. Other times we may feel too exhausted to make it over the next hill. But at each juncture, the Lord is there to tell us that a pleasant downhill lies ahead. And not only that, but he reminds us that Jesus is the "one mightier" than John the Baptist (Luke 3:16). He doesn't just cheer us on; he empowers us with his Spirit. He who is in you is strong and mighty. Ask him to give you heavenly strength.

"Lord, strengthen me when the road gets hilly. Help me to stay on the path, look past the dead ends, and see the glorious road ahead."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. As Christmas draws near, the Church emphasizes the joy that should be in our hearts given all that the birth of our Savior means for us. In the first reading, Zephaniah tells us to “shout for joy”! What are some of the reasons he describes for doing this? Are there areas in your life that make you want to “shout for joy”? What are they?
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these uplifting words: “God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior.” In what specific ways is this true in your life? How do you allow the confidence, strength, and courage you find in Christ to be an example to others? What are some specific steps you can take during this grace-filled Advent season to do even better?
3. St. Paul in the second reading calls us to “Rejoice in the Lord always.” During Advent, we should rejoice not only in the coming of our Lord as a baby at Bethlehem, but his coming into our hearts as well. The assurance of the fullness of salvation in Christ’s second coming should also cause us to rejoice. How well are you able to “Rejoice in the Lord” when faced with the difficulties of the current world situation? If you find it difficult to do so, what steps can you take to interject a new expectancy and trust in the Lord regarding your attitude about the world situation?
4. St. Paul goes on to tell us in the second reading that we are to “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” Why is this praying with expectant faith a path to experiencing in our hearts the “God of peace”?
5. In the Gospel, John the Baptist reminds us of our responsibility to share with others in need. He also “preached good news to the people.” How can you use your time, your talent, and your treasure to help the needy during Advent, as well as share the “good news” of Christmas?
6. In the meditation, we are reminded that “Jesus is the ‘one mightier’ than John the Baptist (Luke 3:16). He doesn’t just cheer us on; he empowers us with his Spirit. He who is in you is strong and mighty. Ask him to give you heavenly strength.” How well are you at bringing your struggles, both big and small, to the Lord in prayer? What happens when you do?
7. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the strength to “to stay on the path” he has set before you – especially during this grace-filled Advent and Christmas Season. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]