

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Third Sunday of Advent, Cycle C

Zephaniah 3:14-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

This is one of those gospels that causes some to wonder how it can be called good news. The Liturgical Fathers softened the blow by beginning our reading for next Sunday with verse 10. Let's pretend that they had begun with verse 7:

John the Baptist would say to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Give some evidence that you mean to reform. (We're in trouble now!) Do not begin by saying that Abraham is our father. I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree that is not fruitful will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

It is no wonder to me that the crowds asked John, "What should we do?" They were shaking in their sandals! At this point in the story, we need to remind ourselves that the theme for this third Sunday of Advent is JOY.

John the Baptist admonishes his followers to do what they can and never take advantage of another. If they own two cloaks, surely they can only wear one at a time, so the other should be given to another who has no coat. If they have enough food to feed two, then they must share. Tax collectors should take only what is due to them, no more. Soldiers must act with justice. No one is to take advantage of others for personal gain.

Some may argue that the only way to get ahead is to take care of one's own needs without worrying about the next guy. Sorry. The peace spoken of by Paul in his letter to the Philippians, the peace that God gives, is beyond all understanding. This only comes to us when

we live in such a way that the world judges us unselfish in our relationship with all others. This peace is the source of our JOY. When we attain this peace we can anticipate what the prophet Zephaniah promised:

***God will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in love.
God will sing JOYfully because of you as one sings at festivals.***