

A PRE-CHRISTMAS TO-DO LIST

Perspective on the Readings for ADV3, yr. C
Zephaniah 3:14-18, Phil 4:4-7, Lk 3:10-18
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by Marc Caissy

Just before Christmas, a pastor we know asked his young nephew Jim to record a message for his answering machine. Rehearsals went smoothly:

I can't take calls right now. Please leave a message. Your call will be returned ASAP.

Then came the test. The 5-yr old recited sweetly,
I can't take calls right now. Please leave a message.

Your call will be returned as soon as, as soon as, as soon as Jesus gets here!

Jesus in our world: that's what Scripture is all about today. Zephaniah urges us to "sing aloud, shout, rejoice!" To the Philippians, Paul writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always... Don't worry about anything."

Even so, two grinch groups would find these readings disturbing...

One group would complain: how can we rejoice when things are so bad?

When Zephaniah called on Israel to rejoice, it was a morally corrupt state, harassed by several enemies. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was in prison. Christians were suspect and victimized by crass prejudice. What was there to rejoice about?

Today, we're stumbling out of a long recession. Many First Nation communities are among the most marginalized in Canada. One quarter of our children live in poverty. In the wider world, several terrorist attacks have recently taken many lives. The specter of global warming haunts us. Church scandals are featured in movies. One currently playing in local cinemas explores the 15-year old cover-up of clergy sexual abuse in Boston. Why rejoice?

Advent is all about answering that question. Yes, we believe in a God who saves us from ourselves. And yes, we celebrate that God becoming human, source of meaning and life in this community! Isn't that enough Good News to rejoice?

A 2nd group would ask, "Why rejoice? We're doing great on our own!" In the early 1900's, Leon Brunschvicq, a French philosopher proclaimed that "modern man needs no redemption." In other words, we're good to go by ourselves, thank you.

Haven't we seen enough massacres to really believe we can do without God? Massive numbers of refugees are fleeing toward Europe because of on-going atrocities in their own native countries. Isn't the sorry state of the world a consequence of human arrogance, stemming from military dominance, economic prosperity or educational superiority? Hasn't much of our vaunted high-tech discoveries simply made it easier to maim and kill each other off?

During the Paris attacks, someone with a grand piano played the famous John Lennon song, "Imagine there's no heaven, no hell below us... Imagine there's no countries and no religion too..." In the 20th century alone, many "isms" have proposed similar visions. Visions, yes, but where's the hope? Are we any happier because of all the stuff we can shop for? Are our schools safer? Are we less lonely, less depressed, less broken-hearted? Are we really doing so great on our own?

Let's face it. We need the Emmanuel more than ever. Advent is good news indeed: it prepares a real hope-filled vision of the world, of ourselves! Does this mean that the Creator will take care of whatever mess we make? When he wrote, "Don't worry about anything", did St. Paul mean the same thing as that little Jamaican ditty, "Don't worry, be happy"? God isn't a babysitter. We're big boys and girls now: we're accountable! To renew the mutual trust between ourselves and the Lord, to celebrate his imminent incarnation, what should we do?

Instead of risking exhaustion and disappointment on spectacular spiritual somersaults, why not get busy on

small things? John the Baptist could've made radical demands on the crowds around him: *fast and pray, leave everything, join me in the desert.*

But no! Instead, John simply called for small steps toward renewal. Those who have, share with the have-nots; tax collectors, be honest; soldiers, don't bully the vulnerable. "With many other exhortations, John proclaimed the Good News to the people." In order to enjoy the peace "that passes all understanding", what should you and I do?

While terrorists are looking for new ways to "kill our joy" (French president Hollande), we believe it will blossom when we share what we have // with the throngs knocking on our doors. Here are three suggestions from our bishops on what we can do.

If possible, join a group to sponsor a refugee family. Just like the doors of a certain inn in Bethlehem, prejudiced minds keep doors closed. Donate to agencies that educate against apathy, intolerance and fear. Last but not least, pray for a deeper understanding of Scripture and its pressing call to solidarity and compassion.

It took a faithful and visionary man like John the Baptist to stand against the social injustices of his day. It will take a faithful and visionary people to embody God's compassion in this crisis. Mary and Joseph sought refuge in Bethlehem, and later with Jesus, experienced exile. Jesus himself had no place to call home during his ministry.

Advent and the current refugee crisis are an opportunity to renew our hearts, deepen our faith, and summon up hope. What should St. Joe's do? Rekindle the Vision and proclaim the Good News to the poor!

Our pre-Christmas to-do list awaits. So, let's relax, rejoice... and get going.