

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (12/12-13/2009)

Zephaniah 3/14-18, Psalm 12, Philippians 4/4-7, Luke 3/10-18

As many of you older folks know, Advent used to be a much more penitential time; it was even called “little Lent” by some people.

There were fast and abstinence days to be observed, celebration was kept to a minimum, and everyone planned to go to confession.

In that setting, this third Sunday was meant to be a respite from the “severity” of Advent, a time to rejoice a bit, to wear rose-colored vestment, to lighten up in view of the quickly approaching feast of Christmas.

Like many such customs, that style of preparing for Christmas is no longer in vogue.

The commerciality of Christmas has already taken over, and there isn't a lot we can do about it.

We can however follow the example of John the Baptist and his followers as outlined in the Gospel for this weekend.

The crowds pleaded with John to tell them what they must do to change and be in the right state of mind and soul before God.

“Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none; and whoever has food should do likewise,” says John.

The tax collectors, for all their identification with the hated Romans, likewise cried out, *“Teacher, what should we do?”*

Be honest in your dealings, says John. Don't cheat the people.

Even soldiers (whether Roman, mercenary or Jewish – we don't know) showed up for baptism by John and they too asked the Baptist for guidance.

He did not say, *“Throw away your weapons. Work for peace and resign your commission.”*

He said simply, *“Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.”*

Notice how down-to-earth John's suggestions are, and notice that they mostly involve decent treatment of one's neighbor, no matter what each person's state in life is.

In other words, be daring enough to go counter-cultural and do the little charitable things right!

No big deal, you might say. And you are right.

As usual, “big” things get their start in small personal actions.

This year, we are especially aware of the archdiocesan program inviting Catholics to come home even if they have not practiced their faith for years.

The sponsors of the program here, and in the Joliet and Rockford dioceses, are acutely aware that one of the key factors is not the wide-spread advertising, but the contacts personally made by Catholics with their friends, relatives, neighbors, acquaintances.

When the invitation is sincerely and warmly extended from one person to another, it takes on additional power and meaning

May we suggest that each of you talk to at least one other person; they may ignore you, reject you, give excuses, hem and haw, get embarrassed.

It's okay. If you are sincere, count on the help of the Holy Spirit.

Your invitation may be the way God works His graceful and wonderful ways.