

Third Sunday of Advent(C) Dec 16, 2018

In this season of preparation we are constantly wondering How will we get everything done?

In the times of John the Baptist, we hear another question: What should we do? That question is at the heart of it all. What should we do?

We're celebrating the 3rd Sunday of Advent now. We're watching and waiting for the coming of Christ. And the same question might be in our hearts: What should we do? In the gospel we just read, people came to John the Baptist with exactly that question. What should we do? You would expect a dramatic answer from John the Baptist. After all, he's a dramatic character who wears camel's hair and eats locusts and preaches a tough message.

But his answer to the question "What should we do?" Did it surprise you? Share with others. Do your work well. It all seems so ordinary. But God takes the ordinary, and makes it extraordinary.

There's a striking verse in the first reading today, from the prophet Zephaniah. "The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, he will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals." Why does God say that about us?

When God the Father looks at us, He sees the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. We are baptized Christians; we are transformed in Christ; we are children of God. In chapter 5 of the 2nd Letter to the Corinthians St Paul puts it like this: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

If this is true, then all our actions take on a new meaning. God looks on us with endless joy; and that means that our actions, however humdrum they may seem, if done out of love, are part of that joy. God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.

Diamonds are stunning. Wars are fought over diamonds. Giving a diamond to another is an impressive gift. But did you know that the base element of diamonds is carbon? Carbon is also the base element of coal. In other words, it's rather ordinary material. Yet something happens far below the earth's surface that transforms carbon into coal. Pressure and heat. The immense pressure and heat that occur far below the surface of the earth makes the carbon atoms bond with four other atoms. And a diamond is formed. That pressure and heat takes something like carbon, which you wouldn't look at twice, and turns it into a thing of beauty.

In the same way, God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Yes, this involves the pressure and heat of our everyday life. The bills that need to be paid. The anxiety about school and relationships and work. But the end result is stunning.

God does this in the everyday realities of our life. It all matters: with God. God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. And that's why, in today's gospel, when the crowds ask John the Baptist "What should we do?" his answer is surprisingly ordinary. You might even say it's work-a-day. Do the commonplace things, the things that are expected of us, and do them well. Because we are children of God, everything we do matters. Do your work well. Whatever your daily work is, do it well. Are you a spouse? Love. Say "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you." Do you speak with others? Be kind instead of cutting. Do you take out the trash or do the dishes? Do it out of love. Are you a Christian? Be what you are, and everything you do has a value of eternity.

St Therese of Lisieux expressed it perfectly with her desire to do ordinary things extraordinarily well out of love for Jesus Christ. St Francis de Sales put it like this: "A tiny act done with two ounces of love is worth more than martyrdom endured with one ounce." This is the secret.

This is a great time to be a Christian, a great time to be a Catholic, because everything has meaning. All the duties and the suffering – as well as the joys – of our lives have infinite value in God's eyes. All the challenges and all the struggles become part of God's plan of salvation.

Christmas is just around the corner. We have this time of Advent to prepare for the most extraordinary event in history: the birth of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly one of us. God takes the ordinary and makes it truly extraordinary.

And in a few moments the ordinary elements of bread and wine – through a few ordinary words spoken by a very ordinary man who has received a very extraordinary gift – are going to become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This sacrament, is the confirmation that God works through our weakness, and that He puts great value on what seems ordinary. We put everything on that paten and in that chalice: we offer God all that we do with the assurance that He will accept it. Let us be aware of this. The words of the offertory are coming up. "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have receive the bread we offer you... We have received the wine we offer you..." Each one of us is invited to put our own intentions there. Our hopes and our fears. Our joys and our sufferings. Our loved ones.

In your hearts, put them there. Because the Eucharist is God's promise: "I will be with you until the end of the world; to me your life is infinitely valuable; I can take the ordinary and make it truly extraordinary."