

**THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT: GAUDETE SUNDAY
YEAR C**

“DON’T WORRY, BE HAPPY”

People come to talk to me a lot about the things in the world that trouble them. Some of these things make them very angry. We fret and worry about so much that we cannot control.

These days the world seems to be a dangerous and very scary place in which to live. Terrorism lurks around every corner. Troubled young open fire in schools and theaters. Many more young open their bodies and futures to heroin addiction and premature death. Planned Parenthood has plans other than parenthood. It’s occasionally difficult to tell a police officer from a criminal, a victim from a victimizer. Now that abortion and same-sex civil marriage are laws of the land, legalized recreational drug use and euthanasia will next follow. Human trafficking reminds us that everyone is for sale and that no one is valued.

We don’t know what to do in a world like this. Do we arm ourselves, or do we take everyone’s arms away? Do we seal our borders against immigrants and refugees, or do we throw open the doors wide and welcome them? Among our presidential candidates, is there one who will do the most good or are we left with electing only one who will do the least harm?

It’s all so unsettling, even frightening sometimes. Where are we going, and what are we doing in this hand-basket?

We pray with along with the psalmist, “Return, O Lord! Have pity on your servants! (Ps 90:13a, c). Our prayers are being answered, and today we rejoice in that knowledge, rest in that consolation.

The *Book of Zephaniah* is almost entirely damning in voice. “Zephaniah’s prophecy of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem emphasizes, perhaps more than any other prophecy, devastation and death” (*The Catholic Study Bible*, “The Book of Zephaniah, 1297). Yet, in its

closing verses, the prophet sounds the coming of the restoration of Jerusalem. “Shout for joy! Sing joyfully! Be glad and exult with all your heart. The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love. [He] will remove disaster from among you” (Zep 3:14, 17, 18).

How do we do that though? How do we shout for joy and exult anymore? How do we make that switch from anxiety (Phil 4:6) living as we do in a world of misfortune (Zep 3:15), to confidence and joy in this same world? The only way we can do this is to individually begin to live differently, to personally choose not to accept or consume what is only display. I quote this passage from St. Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* frequently: “Do not conform yourselves this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). In other words, we can begin to move from fear and confusion to happiness and trust by not letting the songs sung by the violent, the ugly, and the demonizing into our souls. Allow yourself to believe Zephaniah when he told people, “The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear” (Zep 3:). We are not to fear those that can kill the body because the Lord has assured us that they cannot kill the soul (Mt 10:28a).

How do we change our thinking, renew our minds? We start by modifying our behaviors, by acting differently. Consider the idea this way: when we first begin to exercise, our minds aren’t very strong. We give up easily during workouts, have a hard time staying focused. Our minds are occupied with the discomfort our out-of-shape bodies are feeling. It is only after remaining faithful to regular workouts over a period of time that our minds begin to grow stronger and for them to concentrate less on muscle pain as the body changes. So, if we begin by acting differently, eventually our minds will think differently. St. John the Baptist said (and you’ll excuse me for contemporizing him), “If you can’t resist buying more clothes, buy an outfit for

someone else or give a couple of the things in your closet to somebody. If you own your own retail store or service business, be honest pricing your goods, be content with a fair profit and not more. If you are in a position of power, do not mistreat those under you” (Lk 3:10-18).

“Your kindness should be known to all” (Phil 4:5). If it is, if you “do justice and love goodness and walk humbly with God” (Mic 6:8), then “you have no further misfortune to fear” (Zep 3:15b). Misfortunes we will still have, but we will not fear them.

Be faithful and you will receive faith. Be hopeful and you will have hope. Be loving and you will be loved. To be happy, act happily. To be joyful, act joyfully. To be praiseworthy, praise. In this distressing world, be not afraid. Take a less troubled road, it will make all the difference (Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”).

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Readings:

Zephaniah 3:14-18a
Isaiah 12:2-6
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18