



CALLED TO A GENUINE, LASTING CHANGE OF HEART

Politicians often win elections by promising change. The argument goes: "Nothing could be worse than continuing as we are. Elect me, and things will change and get better." Sometimes the promises are fulfilled. Other times, nothing actually changes. And then, at times, things change for the worse. Enter the next politician promising change.

We also long for spiritual change. We want our relationship with God to improve. We want our bonds with family and friends to grow. The Advent season in general, and our Bible readings today offer us the hope of genuine, positive, and lasting change. This change does not come from the political or economic world. It comes from God.

The prophet Zephaniah presents a joyous vision of change for the better. The prophet speaks in terms of civil order and peace. Israel's enemies will be turned away. The people will no longer have reason to fear or be discouraged. The prophet does not attribute this happy state to military power or strong walls or any other human force. He simply says: The Lord is in your midst, a mighty savior. God's presence in the hearts of the people and in their living according to God's law is all the change they need. If the Lord is at the center of their political, economic and personal life, the judgment will be turned away, and they can be glad and exult with all their heart. God is happy when creatures behave themselves and realize their true potential.

John the Baptist tells us that change comes about in very concrete, personal ways. He gives practical advice to different groups. Each person is to change in a way appropriate to his or her state in life. The common denominator of this change is the renewal in love spoken of by Zephaniah. In each practical piece of advice, John directs us to think beyond ourselves. Generosity, justice, honesty, compassion----these are the changes that make the world a better place and bring contentment to individuals. John has something special to say to each of us: in business, in the military, in education, in media and communications, parent, student, nurse, doctor, whoever we are and whatever we do. He tells us to think of others, to serve others, to love others. This is how genuine, positive and lasting change can come about in our economic and political world as well as in our personal lives.

St. Paul tells us to rejoice, because change is on the horizon. Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday takes its name from today's Epistle reading. This is not mindless intoxication but rejoicing in the Lord. Being alive in the Lord is our true joy and our only sure hope. Paul tells us: "Your kindness, your forbearance, your graciousness, your courtesy (the Greek word he uses has all these meanings) should be known to all." One who is alive in the Lord exercises all these virtues. Rejoicing in the Lord by living in the Lord, we mirror the Lord who rejoices over us with gladness, because we are renewed in love. This is the change for which we long, and the change God longs to see in us.

We may or may not be disappointed in the changes or lack thereof our politicians are able to bring us. But we will never be disappointed in the changes God brings us, if we listen to the Good News John the Baptist proclaims to us, if we open up our hearts to receive the one who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and fire.

St. Paul advises us to present our petitions to God with thanksgiving. That is what we do at Mass. May God's kingdom come, in us and in our world. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Third Sunday



of Advent