

Rev. Fr. Leonard Goffine's
The Church's Year

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT



On this Sunday again, the Church calls on us to rejoice in the Advent of the Redeemer, and at the Introit sings:

INTROIT Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men: for the Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous; but in every thing by prayer let your requests be made known to God (Phil. 4). Lord, thou hast blessed thy land; thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob (Ps. 84). Glory be to the Father.

COLLECT Incline Thine ear, O Lord, we beseech Thee, unto our prayers: and enlighten the darkness of our mind by the grace of thy visitation. Through our Lord.

EPISTLE (Phil. 4:4-7). Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is meant by "rejoicing in the Lord"?

By "rejoicing in the Lord" is meant rejoicing in the grace of the true faith we have received, in the hope of obtaining eternal happiness; rejoicing in the protection of the most High under which we stand; and in the persecution for justice's sake in which Christ Himself exhorts us to rejoice, and in which the Apostle Paul gloried (II Cor. 7:4).

What else does St. Paul teach in this epistle?

He exhorts us to give all a good example by a modest and edifying life, to which we should be directed by the remembrance of God's presence and His coming to judgment (*Chrysostom. 33, in Joann.*); he warns us against solicitude about temporal affairs, advising us to cast our care on God, who will never abandon us in our needs, if we entreat Him with confidence and humility.

In what does "the Peace of God" consist?

It consists in a good conscience (*Ambrose*), in which St. Paul gloried and rejoiced beyond measure (II Cor. 1:12). This peace of the soul sustained all the martyrs, and consoled many others who suffered for justice's sake. Thus St. Tibertius said to the tyrant: "We count all pain as naught, for our conscience is at peace." There cannot be imagined a greater joy than that which proceeds from the peace of a good conscience. It must be experienced to be understood.

ASPIRATION The peace of God, that surpasseth all understanding, preserve our hearts in Christ Jesus. Amen.

COMFORT AND RELIEF IN SORROW

"Is any one troubled, let him pray" (Jas. 5:13).

There is no greater or more powerful comfort in sorrow than in humble and confiding prayer, to complain to God of our wants and cares, as did the sorrowful Anna, mother of the prophet Samuel, (I Kings 10) and the chaste Susanna when she was falsely accused of adultery and sentenced to death (Dan. 13:35). So the pious King Ezechias complained in prayer of the severe oppression with which he was threatened by Senacherib (IV Kings 19:14). So also King Josaphat made his trouble known to God only, saying: But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes on Thee (11 Para. 20:12). They all received aid and comfort from God. Are you sad and in trouble? Lift up your soul with David and say: To Thee I have lifted up my eyes, who dwellest in heaven. Behold as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God, until He shall have mercy on us (Ps. 122:1-3). Give joy to the soul of Thy servant, for to Thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul (Ps. 85:4).

GOSPEL (Jn. 1:19-28). At that time the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to John, to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and did not deny; and he confessed: I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he said: I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. They said therefore unto him, Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? what sayst thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one

crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias. And they that were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said to him: Why then dost thou baptize, if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, nor the prophet? John answered them, saying: I baptize with water: but there hath stood one in the midst of you, whom you know not: the same is he that shall come after me, who is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose. These things were done in Bethania beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Why did the Jews send messengers to St. John to ask him who he was?

Partly because of their curiosity, when they saw St. John leading such a pure, angelic and penitential life; partly, as St. Chrysostom says, out of envy, because St. John preached with such spiritual force, baptized and exhorted the people to penance, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem came to him in great numbers; partly, and principally, they were impelled by the providence of God to demand publicly of St. John, if he were the Messiah, and thus be directed to Christ that they might be compelled to acknowledge Him as the Messiah, or have no excuse for rejecting Him.

Why did the Jews ask St. John, if he were not Elias or the prophet?

The Jews falsely believed that the Redeemer was to come into this world but once, then with great glory, and that Elias or one of the old prophets would come before Him, to prepare His way, as Malachias (4:5) had prophesied of St. John; so when St. John said of himself that he was not the Messiah, they asked him, if he were not then Elias or one of the prophets. But Elias, who was taken alive from this world in a fiery chariot, will not reappear until just before the second coming of Christ.

Why did St. John say, he was not Elias or the Prophet?

Because he was not Elias, and, in reality, not a prophet in the Jewish sense of the word, but more than a prophet, because he announced that Christ had come, and pointed Him out.

Why does St. John call himself "the voice of one crying in the wilderness"?

Because in his humility, he desired to acknowledge that he was only an instrument through which the Redeemer announced to the abandoned and hopeless Jews the consolation of the Messiah, exhorting them to bear worthy fruits of penance.

How do we bear worthy fruits of penance?

We bear fruits of penance, when after our conversion, we serve God and justice with the same zeal with which we previously served the devil and iniquity; when we love God as fervently as we once loved the flesh—that is, the desires of the flesh—and the pleasures of the world; when we give our members to justice as we once gave them to malice and impurity (Rom. 6:19), when the mouth that formerly uttered improprieties, when the ears that listened to detraction or evil speech, when the eyes that looked curiously upon improper objects, now rejoice in the utterance of words pleasing to God, to hear and to see things dear to Him; when the appetite that was given to the luxury of eating and drinking, now abstains; when the hands give back

what they have stolen; in a word, when we put off the old man, who was corrupted, and put on the new man, who is created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24).

What was the baptism administered by St. John, and what were its effects?

The baptism administered by John was only a baptism of penance for forgiveness of sins (Lk. 3:3). The ignorant Jews not considering the greatness of their transgressions, St. John came exhorting them to acknowledge their sins, and do penance for them; that being converted, and truly contrite, they might seek their Redeemer, and thus obtain remission of their offences. We must then conclude, that St. John's baptism was only a ceremony or initiation, by which the Jews enrolled themselves as his disciples to do penance, as a preparation for the remission of sin by means of the second baptism, viz., of Jesus Christ.

What else can be learned from this gospel?

We learn from it to be always sincere, especially at the tribunal of penance, and to practice the necessary virtue of humility, by which, in reply to the questions of the Jews, St. John confessed the truth openly and without reserve, as shown by the words: The latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose, as the lowest of Christ's servants, giving us an example of humility and sincerity, which should induce us always to speak the truth, and not only not to seek honor, but to give to God all the honor shown us by man. Have you not far more reason than John, who was such a great saint, to esteem yourself but little, and to humble yourself before God and man? "My son," says Tobias (4:14), "never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words: for from it all perdition took its beginning."

ASPIRATION O Lord, banish from my heart all envy, jealousy and pride. Grant me instead, to know myself and Thee, that by the knowledge of my nothingness, misery and vices, I may always remain unworthy in my own eyes, and that by the contemplation of Thy infinite perfections, I may seek to prize Thee above all, to love and to glorify Thee, and practice charity towards my neighbor. Amen.

EMBER WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT

EPISTLE (Is. 7:10-15). And the Lord spoke again to Achaz, saying: Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God, either unto the depth of hell or unto the height above. And Achaz said: I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord. And he said: Hear ye, therefore, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to be grievous to men, that you are grievous to my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil, and to choose the good.'

EXPLANATION In this Epistle is contained the important prophecy of the Savior's birth from a virgin. War was declared by the kings of Israel and Syria against Achaz, king of Juda, who at their approach was overpowered with fear, and thought of seeking aid from the Assyrians instead of looking to Almighty God for help; and for this lack of confidence in God, the prophet Isaiah was sent to announce to him the destruction of both kings, and his own preservation. The prophet, wishing Achaz to prove his assertion, requested the king to demand

a sign from God; but he being given to idolatry, did not wish to ask a sign from heaven, for he had more faith in the assistance of the demons and of the Assyrians. He offended God by his refusal and the prophet rebuked him, saying: The Lord himself will give you (that is, your posterity) a sign, for the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel, that is-God with us. By these words Isaias desired to impress upon the king, that as surely as he should be preserved from his enemies, so surely this Emmanuel, the Son of the Virgin, would appear to redeem the world from Satan's power. Let us learn from this lesson always to trust in God, who can deliver us from all danger, and let us also be grateful to Him, who seven hundred and forty-three years before the time, permitted, for our consolation, the announcement of the coming of His Son, our Savior.

The gospel (Lk. 1:26-28) of this day will be found in the second part of this book on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.

ASPIRATION O Emmanuel, powerful, holy God! Our Savior and our Redeemer! be with us always in life and death: for, if Thou art with us who can be against us?

COLLECT Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the approaching celebration of our redemption may bring us the necessary graces for the present life, and bestow upon us the rewards of eternal happiness. Through our Lord.

EMBER FRIDAY IN ADVENT

EPISTLE (Is. 11:1-5). And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness, and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears. But he shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins.

EXPLANATION In this epistle the Lord announced to the Jews, through the prophet, the consoling promise that when they were sufficiently punished, and had come to the consciousness of their own misery, the Savior would come and bring all things to order. The rod spoken of by the prophet, is the Blessed Virgin who would proceed from the root of Jesse, that is, from the stem of David, and give birth to the flower, viz., to the Savior upon whom the Holy Ghost, with His sevenfold gifts, would descend, that is, dwell in Him. As a reader of the heart He would judge man, not according to his outward appearance, but according to his intentions. He would not flatter the sinner, but with severe words punish his sinful life, and because just and faithful, He would reward every man without respect to person. Let us be always mindful in all our omissions and commissions, that our Lord sees into our hearts, and judges not only according to our works, but principally according to our intentions, and let us strive ever to have pure motives in all our actions.

ASPIRATION O Fragrant Flower of the Virgin, Jesus our Savior, come and draw us to Thee, that we may walk in the perfume of Thy ointments, and obtain a merciful judgment from

Thee.

COLLECT Show forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy power, and come, that we who confidently trust in Thy love, may be the sooner delivered from all adversities. Through our Lord.

EMBER SATURDAY IN ADVENT

EPISTLE (II Thess 2:1-8). Brethren, we beseech you, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our gathering together unto him: that you be not easily moved from your mind, nor be frightened, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as sent from us, as if the day of the Lord were at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for unless there come a revolt first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth, and is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God. Remember you not, that when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now you know what withholdeth, that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity already worketh: only that he who now holdeth, do hold, until he be taken out of the way, and then that wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.

EXPLANATION At the time when St. Paul wrote this epistle, the false report was circulated that the Last Day was at hand, and Christ was coming to judge all men. The Apostle warns the faithful against trusting this, telling them they should not permit themselves to be misled; for first, the greater part of mankind would fall away from God, and Antichrist, the son of perdition appear, but not until the gospel was everywhere preached. The great falling off would be gradual, caused by the heresies which would arise from time to time, and would be completed by Antichrist, whom our Lord, at last, on the Day of Judgment would kill with the breath of his mouth. Let us learn from this epistle not to be curious concerning the Last Day, and the Advent of Christ, but to prepare, rather for the coming of Jesus into our hearts, that He may be merciful to us in death, and at judgment.

ASPIRATION The gospel of this day will be found in the instruction on the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

COLLECT O God, who seest us afflicted on account of our own wickedness; mercifully grant, that by Thy coming we may be comforted. Through our Lord.