



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

Father Tim was ordained in 1986. Over the years Father Tim has served in parish ministry as both Assistant Pastor and Pastor. For a number of years, he worked full time in youth ministry. He has served his religious community as Vocation Director and as Vicar Provincial. He also served his religious community internationally as the Vicar General, residing in Rome for six years. Currently he serves as the Provincial Superior of the Ontario-Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection, and as Administrator of St. Agatha Parish, in St. Agatha, Ontario.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 12, 2021

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Less than two weeks until we celebrate Christmas, the Incarnation of our Saviour, when we sing and pray for the grace of peace on earth which is announced by the birth of Christ. But the next weeks can be a stumbling block towards peace. For some, the next two weeks can be a time of incredible stress: purchasing gifts for loved ones (and fighting the crowds of others doing the same) ... trying to find that elusive parking spot at the mall, and, oh, those lines at the cashier ... planning the Christmas dinner – for some trying to figure out how to cook a turkey for the first time ... the arrival of family home for Christmas, that may bring the in-laws as well ... the pain of loneliness growing as Christmas nears, sadly for some the first Christmas since the death of loved ones ... and what about those families divided by separation or divorce? For some, it is not a happy time, and certainly not peaceful! Some may respond in John Grisham-like fashion as seen in his book “Skipping Christmas”. A husband and wife decide to skip Christmas so as to avoid the crowds of shopping, office Christmas parties, the horrible fruit cake, and of course the unwanted gifts. I will not reveal what happens, but I do encourage you to read the short story, it is well worth it.

If the above examples are your experience of the days leading up to Christmas, then what, as people of faith, can we do? How can we stop negativity from blocking the grace of peace that is poured out upon the world at Christmas? I have no profound insight or words to offer in answer to these questions. But from experience I have found some “aids” in helping me overcome negative, non-peaceful experiences. One of my greatest moments of peace during the days leading up to Christmas is in the evenings – I turn off all the lights, except for the Christmas tree. There is something peaceful, calming, and very prayerful about sitting quietly in the gentle glow of the Christmas tree. This helps me even more so when I use this opportunity to reflect on the events of the Incarnation about to unfold. To avoid the stressful experience of shopping during the Christmas rush, I strive to make home-made gifts as much as possible, beginning in

the summer leading up to Christmas. This, like the Christmas tree, is a calming, peaceful, and prayerful experience—not to mention the joy I see in those who receive the gift. Another calming experience, because of the aroma, is baking cookies (and, yes, even fruitcake from time to time). The aroma of fresh baking fills the house, bringing with it an amazingly peaceful calm feeling for me. For those who do not bake, try a scented candle in cookie scent.

We all need to actively seek and seize moments when prayer can bring upon us such peace and calm. This is so important during this pre-Christmas time. Find your place of quiet in order to afford prayer the opportunity to bring you peace. You might find, like I do, that sitting in the glow of your Christmas tree, or making homemade gifts, or baking cookies are wonderful opportunities to pray. Find your place of prayer.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

While the three readings for today do appear to have an overriding similar theme, they also have a theme or focus unique to each. Zephaniah will focus upon peace, Paul will focus upon gentleness, and Luke will focus on mission/ministry. Peace is expressed through gentleness, and gentleness finds itself best lived in the service of others: ministry. This paints for us a wonderful picture of what a scriptural community can look like: peaceful, gentle and kind towards others. Are we there? Almost there? Part way there? Not even close? Discuss.

The Table of the Word

THEME: Ministry

As baptized followers of Christ, our ministry is to share in the mission of Christ! The gospel today poses the very question we ought to ask ourselves if we are to share in Christ's mission: "*What should we do?*" What should our ministry look like?

During the New Testament days, ministry was defined as "service", often used in reference to the material services necessary for building and sustaining community. In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told that there was a diversity of ministries, all in order to share in the ministry of Christ. As the church began to move beyond the New Testament days, ministry appears to have taken on two forms: one, actual missionary activity, going out to proclaim the Good News; and two, service within the local community itself. By the time the Council of Trent took place in the mid-sixteenth century, the church was stressing that ministry was the work of the ordained alone. This stance seems to have been in order to counter the Protestant notion of the "priesthood of all believers". With the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, ministry was again being defined in far more broader terms, and not restricted solely to the ordained. The Council focused upon ministry in three ways: (1) service, (2) not limited to the ordained, and (3) that there are a variety of ministries necessary for the church to share in the mission of Christ. With this in mind it is good for us to ask the question asked of John the Baptist in the gospel for today: "*What should we do?*" With all the diverse forms of ministry in the church, which one(s) is/are calling me?

Leader: As your Incarnation draws ever-closer Lord, winnow from us all sin.
For the times we have permitted selfishness and sin to control us, **Lord, have mercy.**
For the times we have ignored the fire of the Holy Spirit, **Christ, have mercy.**
For the times we have run from the harvest of your justice. **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

*Lord our God, already in our midst, and yet to come,
your presence delights us even now as we long for your peace.
Winnow from our lives the chaff of selfishness and sin.
Sow in us a harvest of gentleness and generosity,
for we rejoice in you, even as you exult and sing for joy over us.
Grant this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God, we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Zephaniah 3:14-18a)

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; the Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Philippians 4:4-7)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone, the Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Luke 3:10-18)

The crowds, who were gathering to be baptized by John, asked him, "What should we do?" In reply John said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, John proclaimed the good news to the people.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Prophet Zephaniah. We hear the Prophet calling people to celebrate, to rejoice with song because of all that God has done for them. Zephaniah identifies “peace” as that for which the people should be most thankful. He hinges his message on 3:13; unfortunately verse 13 is not included in today’s reading, but it is worth noting in order to understand verse 14 – 18 in the reading for today. In verse 13, the Prophet puts it very simply: where peace reigns, no one, or anything, can cause the people of God to fear. The verses that follow are a call to establish peace, a lasting peace. This peace is possible if the King of Israel rules with the justice and righteousness that comes from God.

Philippians. Paul echoes the same ideas found in the First Reading – rejoice in the peace that comes from God. However, Paul adds a slight twist when he says that the need to rejoice comes from within the community itself, when he calls people to be known by others for their gentleness. Gentleness, among other qualities, is a grace from God. For this grace bestowed upon us by God we should rejoice. Ultimately, a life of gentleness helps to establish peace within the community, a peace that “*will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*”.

Luke. The overriding theme of this reading from Luke is one that suggests that Christ’s mission is to be our mission as well. Why? Because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, so that, like Jesus, we can set the earth on fire. John the Baptist assists us with this understanding as he provides a “list” (albeit an abbreviated list) of those called to share in the mission of Christ: the crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers. In addressing these three groups John the Baptist presents an incredible challenge still valid to this day. To the **crowds**: John reminds them of one of the cultural beliefs of their day: if I have two coats, then the assumption must be that there is someone who has none. The challenge is to overcome greed and share with others from one’s abundance. To the **tax collectors**: John calls them to be satisfied with the amount of money they collect, and not to seek an unjustified profit on the backs of those paying taxes. Again, the challenge is to overcome greed, especially a greed that causes others to suffer. To the **soldiers**, the enforcers of Roman rule: John calls them to stop extorting and blackmailing people. Yet again, the

challenge is to overcome greed, not to take advantage of one's position in order to seek greater profit on the backs of others.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Zephaniah 3:14 – 18a *“Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.”*

The Prophet Zephaniah wanted to help ease the fear of the People of God, a fear that was very much influenced by the hardships of their day, such as seemingly endless wars and attacks by their enemies. To overcome these fears, Zephaniah calls the people to trust in God who will bring victory, and to trust in their King who will bring God's justice and righteousness. What elements in your life have evoked fear within you? Has God brought “victory” to you so that you were able to overcome your fears? Has someone else (your “king”) helped you to overcome your fears?

Philippians 4:4 – 7 *“Let your requests be made known to God by prayer ...”*

It is interesting, is it not, that Paul puts the onus upon the Philippians themselves to make their needs known to God? Yes, God knows what we need, but Paul tells them to specifically name their requests in prayer and supplication. Paul is calling the people to develop a deeper self awareness, to be able to come to an informed understanding of what they actually need from God in order to be faithful followers and disciples of the Lord. How can we develop a greater self-awareness, and a more informed understanding of what we actually need from God, in order to live out our baptismal call to share in the mission of Christ?

Luke 3:10 – 18 *“What should we do?”*

What a great question the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers ask in the Gospel: what do I need to do in order to more fully share in the proclamation of the faith? The church invites us to bring the Word of God to life, to find relevancy from within God's Word for our world today. And so, what must we do in order to more fully share in the proclamation of the faith?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“Rejoice and exult with all your heart”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Without question, both the Prophet Zephaniah and Saint Paul call us to shout, to sing for joy, in exultation for all the blessings and graces that God has bestowed upon us, especially for the gift of peace. To be joyfully exultant means we must first be keenly aware of what it is we are thankful for, what are some of the graces God has bestowed upon us? Spend time this week compiling a list of the graces and blessings you have experienced as having been bestowed upon you by God. Then when the list is complete, as much as you are able, shout and sing for joy – yes, actually shout, and sing a song in praise of God!

3. Intercessions: (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: With thanksgiving, let us make our requests known to the God who is always near.

For all those baptized in water and anointed with the Holy Spirit: May we serve the world by proclaiming the good news of the One who is coming, we pray to the Lord ...

For all in need of food or clothing, for those deprived of adequate housing or suitable employment: May these blessings soon be theirs, we pray to the Lord ...

For those who will find the coming holiday season a time of anxiety: May we support them with our prayers and assist them with our resources, we pray to the Lord ...

For all who have grown weak from age or illness: May the knowledge that the Lord is in their midst banish fear and renew their hope, we pray to the Lord ...

For all who have died: May the One who is to come in glory gather them into the joy of the kingdom, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*O God, the fountain of life and rejoicing,
renew us in your love and baptize us with the fire of your Holy Spirit,
that we may proclaim to all people the good news of your presence in our midst.
May we delight to share with them your peace, which surpasses all understanding.
This we seek through Christ, our Risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,
OUR FATHER ...**

On the third Sunday of Advent we are invited to reflect on the **joy** we have access to because of our faith in Jesus. One of the defining characteristics of Christ-followers is their *joyful demeanor*. Let's not allow the struggles of this year to steal from the **great joy** we have because of Jesus.

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).