

Third Sunday of Advent, 12 December 2021

Scriptures: Zephaniah 3:14-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

Homily: Fr. Ken

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus called the people to become merciful, to become people of mercy. We, who are the 21<sup>st</sup> century followers of Jesus, are called also by Jesus to become people of mercy. And what does mercy mean? It is defined at the very start of today's Gospel.

At the time, John the Baptist was preaching, trying to get people prepared for the coming of Jesus. The crowds who were listening to John the Baptist asked him, "What should we do?" That is, how should we live in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

John the Baptist told them very directly: "Whoever has two coats should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise".

Each of us is called to be like Jesus, to be "kind and merciful". Among the many circumstances of life that call for mercy is that of shelter, that is, the call for a place to call home. In most industrialized countries in the world, housing is recognized as a human right. But not in the United States.

Here at St. Rita's Church, for upwards of more than a dozen years, we have taken homeless people off the street and given them a hot meal to eat and a warm place to sleep throughout the winter months from November through April. We were the only Catholic Church in all of Marin County to do so.

The weeks of Advent provide us with the opportunity to prayerfully reflect on such actions of mercy.

Think back to that first Christmas.

St. Joseph had to face some very difficult situations in his life. One of them certainly was the time when Mary was about to give birth, to have Jesus. The Gospel of Luke tells us that “while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn”.

The Bible is very clear about this: there was no room for them.

We can imagine Joseph, with his wife Mary about to have a child, with no shelter, no home, no place to stay.

Jesus, the son of God, came into the world as a homeless person.

The Son of God knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head.

We can imagine what Joseph must have been thinking: How is it that the Son of God has no home?

People who are homeless, like Joseph, may ask: Why are we homeless, without a place to live? And those of us who do have a home, a roof over our heads, would also do well to ask: Why do these, our sisters and brothers, have no place to live? Why are these brothers and sisters of ours, homeless?

Joseph’s questions are keenly relevant today. They accompany all those who throughout history, have been, and are, homeless.

Joseph was someone who asked questions. But first and foremost, he was a man of faith. Religious faith gave Joseph the power to find light just at the right moment when everything seemed dark. Faith sustained him amid the troubles of life. Thanks to faith, Joseph was able to press forward when everything seemed to be holding him back.

In the face of unjust and painful situations, faith brings us the light which scatters the darkness. As it did for Joseph, faith

makes us open to the quiet presence of God at every moment of our lives, in every person and in every situation.

There are many unjust situations, but we know that God is suffering with us, experiencing them at our side. God does not abandon us.

Jesus identified with all those who suffer, who cry, who experience any kind of injustice. He says this clearly: "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was a stranger and you welcomed me".

Faith makes us know that God is at our side, that God is in our midst, and that presence of God encourages us to be merciful. Mercy comes from a God who continues to knock at our door, the door of all people, to invite us to be people of mercy, people of compassion, people of service to one another, and ultimately people of love.

Jesus keeps knocking at our door, the door of our lives. Jesus keeps knocking at our door: in the faces of our sisters and brothers, in the faces of our neighbors, in faces of all people in need. It is the call of mercy. It is the call of Jesus that we truly become a people of mercy.

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