

## HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 3-B

“Believe, Change, Rejoice”

(Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; Luke 1; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28)

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Bro. Loreth, OMI, was strong man and great baker as a young Oblate brother, but in old age became quite cantankerous, especially when asked to do something that he didn't want to do, or go somewhere he didn't want to go. He thought that if he could find a good woman friend to be his companion, he would be happy and actively pursued relationships along that line which tried the patience of his Oblate superiors. One day his superior asked him what he would do when he got to heaven. “Find Mary,” he replied, “She's the mother of the Lord, and a good woman.” To the question “Who would be next?” he replied, “Theresa of the Child Jesus because she was pure, innocent and also a good woman.” And next, he would look for Theresa of Avila, because she was smart, knew how to pray and also was a good woman. “What about Jesus, wouldn't you look for him?” was the next question, to which Bro. Loreth replied, “Jesus - he can wait!”

Advent is a time to prepare the way for Jesus, in our hearts and the hearts of our children, through humble self awareness.

A few key questions might get us thinking: Are we experiencing salvation? Are we making Jesus wait? What are we waiting for to change? Could Jesus be living among us unknown? What do I need to change in my life to experience salvation?

I remember a conversation with a particular couple. The wife was exasperated, fed up with being ignored, taken for granted, given the silent treatment, shouted at and even struck a few times. She finally asked her husband to leave the house and move out, but he refused. The situation was becoming more and more intolerable for her, which all came out in my presence just as I happened by to visit.

I was amazed at how he simply could not see any problem. For him, everything was fine; there was no need to change anything; he couldn't see why *she* had a problem. I suspect that was because he always got his way and didn't expect anything more from the relationship. I left feeling very sad, for here was a couple who were missing out on all that life had to offer, because he could not see any need to change, and refused to change his ways. His kids and family were suffering from that attitude. Instead of preparing the way for the Lord, I think he was making Jesus *wait*. He was an obstacle to the coming of the Lord in that family, which I suspect will not survive much longer.

Humble self awareness is so essential for us to experience salvation, to receive the peace and joy of Jesus in our hearts, relationships and troubled world. The Pharisees, full of self righteousness and false pride, were hostile, testy and sharp with John the Baptist, trying to figure out who he was in an attempt to maintain their position of privilege, power and control. With such an attitude, they were not open to change. They resisted the way of the Lord and missed out on a golden opportunity to find new life.

Jesus came to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners. We need to be able to name how we are oppressed, broken and captive, to be able to open up to him and experience his salvation.

The baptism that is mentioned in the gospel means dying to sin. That is a radical act, needing the baptism of Jesus. There is a difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. John could only call people to repentance; Jesus could empower them to do so. John could only challenge people not to sin; Jesus could help them stop sinning. John could only speak about forgiveness; Jesus' death on the cross was the forgiveness of sins. John could only speak of changing attitudes; Jesus could give us the Spirit that raised him from the dead to heal our negative attitudes.

Jesus also came to proclaim a year of favour. This *Jubilee* year of favour is based on the Jewish notion of Sabbath. For the Jewish people, every 7<sup>th</sup> day was Sabbath. Every 7<sup>th</sup> year was a sabbatical year. A Jubilee year occurred every fifty years, after 7 series of 7 years, or 49 years. The Jubilee year was a year of concern for others, the weak especially. The reason is because all the land is the Lord's; we are but renters who must provide for the redemption of the land. The year of liberation is a year of release, of setting free and of rest for the land.

The word *Jubilee* comes from the Jewish word, *Yobel*. A *yobel* is the ram's horn that is blown to announce this year of solemn atonement. We need to remember the Jewish focus on *atonement* for exploitation, abuse, for what has gone wrong. In the year of Jubilee, all debts were forgiven. Many are saying to the large corporations and the World Bank that a similar year of Jubilee is needed today to enable the world's poorer countries to escape from the financial stranglehold put on them by the western countries manipulation of an invalid and unjust international debt.

Ezekial refers to a year of liberty in that the property belongs to the people. None will be dispossessed of their heritage in the Lord. In a similar vein, Isaiah today refers to the Spirit anointing Jesus, who goes to the poor in a time of favour.

This year begins to be linked with future expectations and an ideal context. It is a social blueprint founded on deep biblical concepts of justice and equality and is the forerunner of the Christian era with its concern for others, land and freedom.

Within this context I think of a woman who was terribly abused by her father, and her husband. After years of withdrawing, silent suffering, fear and nightmares, she finally got the courage to go on a healing journey, admit her wrong doing in reaction to how she had been hurt, deal with her issues, and trust someone with her story. Little by little, she is being healed and set free from her oppression and captivity. As she shares her story now with others, she will be helping them to prepare the way for the Lord in their own lives as well.

The Eucharist we celebrate today calls us to recognize Jesus among us, and to recognize our need for him; to taste salvation and to experience the healing power of faith that changes us and sets us free.

So let us prepare the way for Jesus, in our hearts and the hearts of our children, through humble self awareness. Let us open ourselves to change and recognize the saviour at work in our lives today.