

Third Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2017



by Alexandra Carroll

As we continue to wait in hopeful anticipation for the coming of our savior, we are confronted by a society affected by injustice and violence that is contrary to the gospel message. One example that penetrates several aspects of our society is the continued use of the death penalty. In the last year, over 20 individuals were executed, many of whom had claims of innocence, severe mental illness or intellectual disability, came from situations of poverty, and were people of color. The persistence with which the death penalty remains in our society stands as an affront to our Catholic call to restoration and reconciliation. How are we to reconcile this injustice with the promise and joy of Advent?



The third Sunday of Advent, traditionally understood as Gaudete Sunday, invites us from a time of holy anticipation into one of spirit-filled action. Filled with excitement for the coming of Christ, we are challenged to rise up and bear witness to the coming glory by preparing the way.

The first two weeks of Advent have invited us to enter into a time of anticipation and waiting. We know the birth of Christ is near and that soon the glory promised to God's people will be present in our midst. This week we are reminded of just what it is we are waiting for and how we are invited to participate in the earthly mission of Christ.

Anointed with the Spirit, Jesus will come to fulfill the promises of God made in the Hebrew scriptures (Is 61:1). This week is the only time in Advent that the promised glory and freedom is given concrete examples. They reveal the countercultural mission of the coming Messiah: glad tidings to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, freedom for the captives and release of the prisoners (Is 61:1).

It's significant that on this penultimate week of Advent, the true meaning of God's justice is revealed. The coming of God will bring about a justice and peace in our society unlike any we have seen before. The meaning and full extent of God's justice can now be fully understood and we can no longer ignore the contrast we see in our society. This proclamation of what is to come is meant to be presented, discussed and adopted by the Christian community (1 Thess 5:22-24). We are challenged to unite together, under our shared faith in Christ. The community of believers, in addition to political parties and elected officials, are to attend to the demands of justice as we prepare for the coming of Christ.

This is the call of Advent, to not only wait but to witness to the coming of Christ. Just as John the Baptist served as a living testament to the promises to come in Jesus (Jn 1:6-8) we too, must announce the coming joy of Advent. We must rise up and shout the good news that is upon us. We are invited to take on the role of John the Baptist and work for justice in our time. Our living witness serves as a precursor and acceptance of the reality that is to come in Christ. Unlike any who have come before him, Jesus will baptize not with water but with the spirit and the promises of God will be fulfilled (Jn 1:26).

This Gaudete Sunday, I invite you to be that living witness. Prepare the way by joining the work to end the death penalty and create a more restorative criminal justice system. Help to bring about the transformation of our society where relationships are restored, harm is healed, and violence is replaced by reconciliation. The time of Christ is near. Are you ready?

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