

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, YR C

December 13th, 2009

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
Rev. Jeff McGowan

1ST READING: ZEPHANIAH 3:14-18

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart...The Lord is in your midst, a mighty Savior...he will renew you in his love.

PSALM: ISAIAH 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

Cry out with joy and gladness; for among you is the great and holy One of Israel.

2ND READING: PHILIPPIANS 4: 4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always...Dismiss all anxiety from your minds.

GOSPEL: LUKE 3: 10-18

The crowds asked John: "What ought we to do?"

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The Christmas story begins with John the Baptist. John led the way as an adult; but still our preparation begins with him. John simply laid it all out and people went to him because they knew they'd hear the truth. And, quite frankly, his message is that we are all guilty. Every one of us is guilty and every one of us needs to be forgiven. If we know we need God to forgive us, why do we struggle so to forgive each other?

Some time ago, during the Christmas season, I received a call from a family to visit a woman who was dying slowly. Now I knew this woman and her family well and it was personally painful seeing her suffer. I had visited her and given her Last Rites several times. I was busy and thought the family was just anxious and needed to be reassured. I said, "She's fine, she really is fine, she's ready to go." But her daughter said, "No, Father, she is not fine, something is wrong. She keeps talking about a mesh that she can't break through. We don't know what she is talking about. We think you may help." I went. I asked her about the mesh. She said she felt trapped in a mesh. I tried to talk about it but we got nowhere. I felt there was a secret; she couldn't say what she knew she needed to say. Finally, I just changed the subject and told her, I would miss her and a few of the things about her I would miss. Her daughters chimed in, saying,

“we will all miss you.” She said, “Tell, *him* to tell me he will miss me.” I had heard him tell her before many times that he would miss her; he had been very attentive all the way through this process. Well, *him* came into the room. He took her hand and gently told her that he would miss her. Then he said, “I thank you for 54 years of marriage and I want to ask you to forgive me for any hurts or disappointments I caused you and I forgive you.”

“Wow!” I thought. There was silence. There was such a prolonged silence it began to feel uncomfortable. Her lips were pressed tightly together. I thought, “I guess in 54 years of marriage a lot of little hurts must pile up. You know there is not a man alive who can satisfy his wife and there is not a wife alive who can satisfy her husband. Deep inside we have expectations, mostly unrealistic. I read somewhere that we have an ancient memory of paradise in our DNA. But we are not in paradise. Adam and Eve were in paradise and they still messed up.”

By now, I felt like an intruder. Everyone was fidgety and teary. The silence was intense; there didn't seem to be enough air in the room for all of us. Because of my own anxieties I broke the silence. I said with all the pastoral care I could, I said, “Sweetheart, you need to forgive and let go. That's why you are blocked by that mesh.” She shot a look out of the corner of her eyes that made me wish *I* was dead! Her husband kissed her hand again and again; he was crying; his shoulders were shaking. He said, “I am so sorry; I had no idea; I have always loved you. I was always faithful. I love you. I am so sorry. Please don't leave me without forgiving me.” I saw a tear go out of her eye. She took a deep breath and said, she could feel her heart becoming calmer. She said, “It really wasn't that bad. I don't know why I... (There was a slight pause)...of course I forgive you Rick. I have always loved you; and please forgive me too.” Later that evening, as the sun went down and the shadows lengthened, she went home peacefully.

My friends we are all guilty; we all need to be forgiven and we need to forgive. Our sights are too small. We are so easily distracted by all the Christmas stuff. We are too nearsighted to see our own reality. This isn't a perfect world, we have our own human limitations. And we cannot buy a present that will give lasting happiness to anyone. Despite the advertisement not even diamonds last

forever. The Good News invites us to focus on the gifts God gives and imitate Jesus not simply be charmed by the story of the baby. Be forgiven; forgive; live; love and be happy as never before. These are the gifts that do last forever.