

REFLECTION FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

We are on the third Sunday of Advent today. It is the Sunday of joy. Both in Advent and in Lent, there is a Sunday on which the Church invites us to experience joy, telling us that God's ways are always the ways of hope and joy, even amid life's difficulties, and the crosses we must bear. God is always a reason for our joy. That is why today's readings contain this call to joy.

In the first reading, the prophet Zephaniah exclaims: *“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! ... The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”*

The prophet invites the people to rejoice because they have God with them. When we have God for us, *who will be against us?* as St. Paul wondered. Let us rejoice because God is with us; he dwells among us; he is our savior. Let us experience the deep joy of those who know that God never abandons us; he is always by our side.

This is why, in the Responsorial Psalm, we are invited to *“Shout aloud and sing praise, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. ...for the Lord is my strength and my praise, and he has been my salvation. ... Give thanks to the Lord, ... make known among the peoples his deeds; proclaim that his name is exulted. Let this be known through all the earth. ... for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”*

In the second reading, St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, also invites us to rejoice. He tells us: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.”* The Lord walks with us, let us rejoice in him. Let us put our trust in the Lord who came to save us and cultivate a Christian joy in our lives.

For his part, the Gospel presents John the Baptist preaching to the people and giving them advice, insisting that they always try to live a life guided by the ideals of service, with respect for one another, and concern for carrying out our responsibilities well. At the same time, in all humility, he told people that he was not the Messiah they were expecting, but only someone who had come to prepare for his arrival, his revelation to the people. John baptized with water, but the Messiah would bring a baptism of fire: the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus will reveal himself to be the Messiah who has come to bring fire to the earth, to

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announce God's Good News and to give his life for humanity. We place our hope in him. He is the reason for our joy today and every day. Amen.