

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah:

Thus says the LORD: Woe to the city, rebellious and polluted, to the tyrannical city! She hears no voice, accepts no correction; In the LORD she has not trusted, to her God she has not drawn near. For then I will change and purify the lips of the peoples, That they all may call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one accord; From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia and as far as the recesses of the North, they shall bring me offerings. On that day You need not be ashamed of all your deeds, your rebellious actions against me; For then will I remove from your midst the proud braggarts, And you shall no longer exalt yourself on my holy mountain. But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, Who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD: the remnant of Israel. They shall do no wrong and speak no lies; Nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; They shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19 and 23

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame. When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth. When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves. The LORD redeems the lives of his servants; no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:28-32

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' The son said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you. When John came to

you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 3rd Tuesday of Advent

We just had a reading from Zephaniah on Sunday. It was a powerfully hopeful passage. This passage actually precedes it in the book. It ended in verse 13. Sunday’s reading began with verse 14. We have not read these in order. Since the message of scripture is intended for those who read or hear it, what can we make of the prophet addressing a city? It is a symbol of God’s entire people. The area of God’s concern is vast. From Ethiopia to Iran is a huge expanse. Did this indicate what was in store for the people of Israel and Judah? These are the places that drew God’s people in Diaspora. He also spoke of a remnant. Only a remnant returned during the reign of the Persians.

Micah lived, served and preached in the century before the Diaspora. Has his prophesy of hope after cataclysm taken place? A remnant did return to Judah, but the proud who brag are still among us. Human nature has not yet changed; we still brag, use deceit and can be proud. Even in a post Easter world and as people born post Pentecost into Christ, we still need to hear the prophet’s message. We are works in progress; in the process of redemption. His message is universal and to all, not other people but us.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor; do we? How does the Lord answer them? God doesn’t change people’s situations or environments. God changes people. If we don’t hear the cry of the poor, nothing will get done. The Lord works through us. This is a dilemma. Jesus said that the poor will always remain with us. God’s saving work will continue; one person at a time until Jesus returns. The witness we give will keep giving in the mean time and will always be a sign of hope. We, as sinners, can be impoverished too and in need of God’s saving grace. The poor are not just those with no money. One can never have enough of God’s infinite, eternal and unconditional love. As people of faith, we can act in faith to respond; also by God’s saving grace as witnesses to faith.

When I was a kid at home, I had to do my chores. One sin I always confessed was disobeying my parents. As I have gotten older, I realized that I always wound up doing them. It was protest of which I was guilty, not disobedience. The daily trash always made it to the garbage can. The dishes always got clean. Things always made it back to their proper storage place. I, in retrospect, always ended up like the first son who was obedient, but under protest. Jesus has made a call in this gospel to hear and then heed him. His words are not for the ones who do not yet believe; they are for those of us who do.

These words, which at first, can seem such a challenge actually encourage sinners, of whom I am the foremost, to receive God’s salvation and Jesus’ forgiveness. Sinners have always heard and then heeded Jesus’ message, then and now. Can anything happen that is not God’s will? When we sin, God is there to save and forgive. Salvation is only a thought away, through faith in God and in Jesus. Human sin was the reason that Jesus was born. He chose to die for each of us, which was God’s plan from creation and before.

Often the Gospel mentions those to whom Jesus addressed his message. Today it was the chief priests and elders of the people. I'm a priest. He included me in his audience. What's an elder? Someone who's old? I meet that category as well. Elder here has a different connotation. An elder was one practiced in the faith. I'm writing this and you are reading. We are all practiced in our Christian and Catholic faith. We are elders of the people. The word elder is presbyter in Ancient Greek, the language of the gospel. It is also translated in English as priest. By nature of our Christian Baptism, we are anointed priest, prophet and king. Each baptized Christian is an elder, or priest, of the people. We are Jesus' audience not just those people who lived long ago and far away. We need Jesus' message as much as they did. We strive to hear, heed and then live what Jesus intends.

The promise of Micah's message remains unfulfilled. He did not know what we know, believe what we believe, or expect what we expect. We know Jesus, believing in his name and waiting for his return. We strive to follow God's will as God's witnesses to Jesus. We try to live God's love in all we do. We will fail. God will forgive us on our way to God's Kingdom.

May the Lord lead us and heal us when we fail to follow.

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