

Third Sunday of Advent

Those of us who have experienced recent illness know what it means to ask the question. “What must I do?” What must I do to get over this illness and get back to normal life again? What must I do to give my body the best chance to recover?

“What must I do” was the question that the people who were coming to John the Baptist to be baptised were asking him.

It is not surprising that as Luke tells the story, John called people to a repentance that involved being generous and just. Those who had more than they needed for themselves were told to share what they had. Tax collectors were told to collect only what they were entitled to collect in tax. Soldiers were told to be content with their pay. Soldiers were in the habit of adding to their pay packets by taking bribes and demanding payment from the people that they were employed to protect.

Each of us could come to John today and ask the same question, “What must I do?” John would act like a mirror for us inviting us to look at ourselves and to see what needs to change in our life. He would want us to especially reflect upon how we are acting towards other people. He would want us to notice if we had grown

selfish and had closed our ears and our hearts to those who have asked our help. When life is reasonably comfortable for us it is easy to believe that we don’t have anything more than we need. It may not be until we are moving house that we realize that we have much more than we need.

Some of us have found that a good way to give Christmas presents to our families and those who are close to us is to give a Global Gift through Caritas Australia or through some other charity. The card that those people receive will read something like this. “Your Christmas gift this year is very special. I decided to make a donation on your behalf, to Caritas Australia. My feeling is that this gift embraces the true spirit of Christmas and reminds us of God’s love for all humanity. I hope it brings you joy too.”

John would want us to look closely at anything that smells of injustice. It is often only when other people point things out to us that we notice that what we are doing may be unjust. That can be hard. It can be harder when somebody then asks the question, “What are you going to do about it?”

Advent is a good time for us to look at our relationships with others in our world and also those much closer to home. It is a time for reconciliation. It’s a good time to

experience God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We will have a Reconciliation service this Wednesday evening at Our Lady of Mercy. Advent is also a good time to seek forgiveness and healing from those we may have hurt. It's a time to pray that we may be forgiven by them. Even our best efforts to heal broken relationships are not always successful. We have to rely upon God to work in our hearts and in the hearts of those who are at odds with us.

St. Paul reminds us that the work of reconciliation is the work of God. He tells us today that he wants us to be happy in the Lord. "Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near." When we truly desire reconciliation and ask God for it then our prayers will be answered, "And that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

When we do open our hearts to the Lord and to what he wants to do in us, we experience a peacefulness that is difficult to describe. It might even get close to that exuberant joy that is expressed today in our reading from the Prophet Zephaniah. "Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord, the king of Israel is in your midst, you have no more evil to fear." This is a

great reading for the day that we light our third Advent candle, the pink candle of Joy.

Have we every thought that God may look at us and ask the question, "What must I do?" Have we ever thought that God looks at us with love and asks "What must I do to help the one I love to grow into the person that he or she needs to be? What must I do to help this person to be fully human, free to live in love as I have made them to live?" This third Sunday of Advent is a great time for us to imagine what God desires for us. It is a time to open our hearts to whatever it is that God wants to do for us. It is a time to allow Our God to reveal again the gift that He has prepared for us this Christmas.