Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“What should we do?” (Luke 3:10).

Third Sunday of Advent

Zep 3:14-18a; Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

Much can be made of the coincidence of Gaudete Sunday in Advent and the feast of our Lady of Guadalupe. North Americans are reminded that Guadalupe is the Mother of the Americas and not just a celebration in Mexico or for the Hispanic community in the United States. Our Lady, Mother of God, so central to Christmas, is a mother who watches over all her children.

What does she see among so many desperate mothers and children, families hunkered down at the Rio Grande, caught between a closed border and the dangers of life under siege from the drug gangs and politicians in both countries paralyzed by broken immigration systems? Do we dare hear the words of Mary’s Magnificat about who will be first and last when God keeps every promise made to the poor and the excluded?

Scriptural themes play out in many of the tensions of today. What would John the Baptist say if he were preaching to those on both sides of the borders here or in Europe as he announced the imminent arrival of the God of justice and repentance? What demands do our consciences make regarding the plight of so many “holy families” seeking shelter, knocking on closed doors, as we measure our security and good fortune against their misery? How can we make a difference?

John offers us a way forward in specific ways. Each person who asked him, “What should I do?” received an answer tailored to their situation. If you have two cloaks or more food than you need, share with those who have less. Do your job honestly, be fair, don’t bully or cheat. Do the best that you can where you are, with what you have.

This is the beginning of discipleship, small steps on the road to maturity, things we learned in kindergarten. Jesus came first as an infant, then a child, then a young man learning a trade. At each stage of his development, he learned the joy of being good, generous, compassionate and sensitive to others. This is real life, the ordinary stuff of real relationships that lead to communities of purpose, efforts greater than few can do but many can turn into miracles. If we lay a foundation of gratitude, the rest will be given.

Gaudete Sunday reminds us that joy is the secret of transformation and healing. Christmas is more than an event but a lifelong process, a step-by-step surrender to God that directs our journey. First a baptism of water, then, when we are ready, one of wind and fire. Let us begin again at the beginning.

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