

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT - YEAR B - OLPH – 2017

(Isaiah 61:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8;19-28)



Fr. Alfred Delp, S.J. wrote powerful reflections on Advent before he was hung by the Nazis on February 2, 1945.

Advent is a season of hopeful expectation. The season is divided into two parts. In the first part we focus on our preparation for the time when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. Science points to the fact that the universe began with a “Big Bang” and continues to expand. As the universe had a beginning, so we believe that it will also have an end, when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

When will Christ return? Jesus deliberately left the answer to this question vague so that in every age people would wait for him with eager expectation and not fall into a life of sin. St. Augustine wrote in the fourth century “Whether any of us here present will see the end of the world, I don’t know. Even so, the time is near for us, for we are mortal.”

Today we begin the second half of Advent which focuses more on preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth at Bethlehem. During Advent we wait with Mary and prepare to joyfully celebrate his birth in the stable at Bethlehem. The Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” is a Latin word which means “Rejoice”. We are to rejoice that the Lord is near. The Solemnity of Christmas is drawing closer and our own redemption is drawing nearer. A Christian should neither fear death, nor cause death. God alone is the Master of Life. Only he has the power to give a human life. Only he has the right to take an innocent life to himself.

St. Paul commands us to rejoice always in 1 Thessalonians. How is it possible to rejoice, if we just don’t feel like rejoicing? If the focus of our life is merely on our passing emotions and external circumstances it is impossible to rejoice always. But the rejoicing that St. Paul command is born of deep faith and hope of eternal life. This type of rejoicing is not dependent on the state of our health, the economy or the experience of

any sort of loss.

In 1944, Fr. Alfred Delp was a 38 year old priest who was preparing to take final vows as a Jesuit. He was an outspoken opponent of the Nazis and helped Jews to escape from Germany. He was arrested on July 28, eight days after Claus von Stauffenberg's attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler. He was falsely accused of being a part of this plot, but his involvement in the Kreisau Circle was enough to have him convicted and sentenced to death. The Kreisau Circle hoped to reorganize Germany according to a Christian world view.

Fr. Delp was imprisoned during Advent and was able to secretly write down his reflections and say Mass with the help of some sympathetic guards. He said that Advent was a time for rousing. Because his world had been shaken, it helped him to see things more clearly. He entered Advent more intensely and alert than ever.

He was reminded of a gift he had been given once of an Advent Angel. The Angel carried a banner which said "Be of good cheer. The Lord is near." Both the gift and the giver were destroyed by a bomb. Through his suffering in a prison cell, awaiting execution, Fr. Delp came to fully appreciate the true meaning of Advent. He wrote "May the time never come when men forget about the good tidings and promises, when so immured within the four walls of their prison, they see nothing but gray days through barred windows placed too high to see out of."

Fr. Delp reminds us to be attentive to the message of the cheering words of the angel, and to rejoice always, not just when things are going well for us. The virtue of hope is more just optimism or positive thinking. Hope and Joy are rooted in the promises of Christ who doesn't promise us

ultimate happiness in this life but in the next.

In the meantime Fr. Delp said that we had work to do. He wrote “There is so much despair that cries out for comfort; faint courage that needs to be reinforced; perplexity that yearns for meaning.... God’s messengers who have themselves reaped the fruits of Divine seeds, even in the darkest hours, know how to wait for the fullness of the harvest.”

Fr. Alfred Delp fought against the culture of death in Hitler’s Germany. He was executed by hanging on February 2, 1945. Before he died, Fr. Delp secretly professed his vows as a Jesuit. He died on the Feast of the Presentation. Candles are blessed on this feast to recall the prophecy Simeon made that Christ is the Light of the World. St. John the Baptist in our Gospel today reveals to us that he was called to give testimony to the Light. We who have been baptized into Christ are also called to be a light which shines in the darkness and to rejoice no matter what are external circumstances are.

In fact, the darker the world becomes, the more the world is in need of the Light. Don’t be afraid to give witness to the truth about the sanctity of human life. The right to life is the most basic human and civil right that we have. Don't be afraid to be a voice for unborn children. They have no voice but yours. Don't be afraid to stand up to the perversion of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Doctors should use their skills in the service of life. Treat pain, but not by killing the patient. Don’t be afraid to proclaim the truth that the family is the foundation of society and that marriage consists of a man and a woman who are committed to one another for life and open to the transmission of life. The more it’s denied, the more we need to affirm this truth. Don’t be afraid to challenge young people to be chaste. Some may not listen, but others will.

You'll be helping them to find true happiness and avoid spiritual, physical and emotional pain.

Like John the Baptist and Fr. Alfred Delp, S.J. we need to be a voice in the desert, preparing a straight path for the Lord, As we wait with Mary to celebrate the birth of her son Jesus Christ, let us pray and work toward the day that when the violence of abortion will be unthinkable and every child will be able to celebrate their birthday and human life will respected and protected in every stage of life.

Rejoice always, even when the power of the culture of death or personal problems seem overwhelming, because it will not always be so. Our hope is rooted in Christ who by his life, death and resurrection has defeated the power of death and given us hope of eternal life, and hope too, that justice will ultimately prevail.