

Advent 3C.18; Zeph. 3:1-18a, Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18, “*What Should We Do?*”

Today is Gaudete Sunday, 3rd Sunday of Advent. *Gaudete* (Lt.) means **Rejoice!**

Yet, we hear in the gospel a *worried* tone, ‘*What should we do?*’

Hear a tale by *Leo Tolstoy* about a cobbler named, *Martin*. He lived & worked in a basement room. Its one window enabled him to *see just the feet* of the passers-by on the street above. But since there was hardly a pair of boots or shoes that had not passed through his hands,

Martin was able to identify the passers-by by their shoes.

Life had been hard on him. His wife died, leaving him with a young son. Sadly, his son had barely reached the age when he could help his father, when he fell ill and died. Martin was devastated. He gave way to despair.

He gave up the practice of his religion.

One day an old friend of his dropped in. Martin poured out his soul to him. His friend advised him to *read a little from the Gospels each day*, promising him that if he did so, **light & hope would come back into his life.** Martin took his friend’s advice. At the end of each day he would take the Gospels and read a little.

At first he meant to read only on Sundays. But soon he read every day.

Slowly things began to change for the better.

One night as he sat reading he thought he heard someone calling him: ‘*Martin, look out into the street tomorrow, for I will come to visit you.*’ Since there was no one else in the room, he presumed it was the Lord who had spoken to him. When he sat down to his work next day he was very excited. As he worked he kept a close eye on the window. He scrutinized every pair of shoes or boots that passed above him. ***He was looking for someone special.***

But all he saw was the usual people passing by.

In the early afternoon he saw a pair of familiar boots. They belonged to an old soldier called ***Stephen***. *Going to the window he looked up & saw the old man hitting his hands together for it was bitterly cold outside.* Martin wished that he would move on, because he was afraid he might obstruct his view,

... and he would not see *the Lord* when he passed.

But Stephen just stood there. Finally, it occurred to Martin that maybe Stephen had nothing to eat all day. So he tapped on the window & beckoned him to come in. He sat him by the fire and gave him tea & bread.

Stephen was most grateful. He said he hadn’t eaten for two days.

As he left Martin gave him his 2nd overcoat as a shield against the biting cold. All the time Martin was entertaining Stephen he had not forgotten the window.

Every time a shadow fell on it he looked up, but nobody special passed. Night fell. Martin finished his work & reluctantly closed the window shutters. After supper he took down the Gospels and, as was his custom, opened the book 2 at random. There his eyes fell on these words: *‘And John said to the people, “If anyone has two coats he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.”’* *Ahh...Martin understood then*, that *the Lord* had indeed come to him that day. He had come in the person of Stephen. And Martin had made him welcome. All at once his heart was flooded *with joy*, ... *a joy the likes of which he had never before experienced.*

(New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies, Advent 3C, F. McCarty)

What should we do?

John the Baptist gave *the crowd*, and us, some very practical, down-to-earth advice in today’s gospel. To the ordinary folks he said: *those who are well off* share with those who are not well off. *To tax collectors* he said: don’t exact more than your rate. In other words, don’t use your office to exploit people. *And to soldiers* he said: don’t use your position of power to intimidate or oppress people.

In essence what he was saying was: *show genuine concern for others,*
... *and be just in all your dealings.*

That’s how practical Christianity actually is.

Have you noticed what *Martin the Cobbler* noticed, that as we prepare for Christ’s coming, he comes not as a great ruler in flowing robes of gold & silk, nor as a mighty warrior imposing his will. He comes in the poverty and the vulnerability of ... **a newborn, who requires our concern & care.**

It was true at the beginning & it is true today.

Here’s the thing. We have no doubt but that Jesus will come to us. But he doesn’t come to us *only at Christmas*. He comes to us *always*, and at the oddest times and places, and wearing different (often distressing) disguises.

He comes in the other person, especially of the one in need.

Pope Francis tells us that, when we care, we will find *Martin the Cobbler’s great joy* by caring for others. It *“will give you an energy, a vitality, a real joy where you will find your truest self”* ^(GE #32). What John asks of the crowd is *within our grasp*: to live faithfully and to do good in the present moment,

... **right where we are, as we are.**

Advent urges us to prepare a way for the Lord. There is no better way to prepare than to be welcoming towards those in need. The way to find peace and happiness and goodness ... is to forget oneself ... and think of others.

By the way, do you know how to spell joy?

(large white board with this):

Close but try this: J, Jesus; O, others; Y, you

At the Advent Liturgy of the Joy of Salvation,

... let's earn how to spell!