

Third Sunday in Advent, Cycle B December 11, 2011

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reflect Like the Snow

Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is the Latin word meaning rejoice. And rejoicing is a theme we hear in our readings and Mass prayers today. As part of our rejoicing, we lit the pink candle on our Advent Wreath today rather than just the purple ones which represent penitence. We rejoice because Advent is halfway through; the great feast of Christmas is only two weeks away.

I reflected on this morning's readings, and I rejoiced last night as I went outdoors and looked up at the beautiful full moon brightly visible in the clear sky. I don't know how many of you caught a glimpse of it. The snowy ground reflected the moonlight and my whole backyard was brightly lighted. And I was reminded of a winter backpacking trip I had taken many years ago. We left for that trip after work and didn't get to the trailhead until about ten o'clock at night. And then we still had to hike two miles to our campsite. We took out our flashlights and put on our packs, but as we headed through the woods we realized we didn't even need to use our flashlights. There was a full moon and a fresh dusting of snow, just like last night, and we could clearly see the path that we were supposed to follow.

And as I remember that night, I am reminded of the wonderful image of Jesus as the sun and Mary as the moon. The moon has no light of its own; it can only reflect the light given off by the sun. But that reflected light can still give us comfort and show us the way that we should travel; it can be the source of joy and rejoicing. I could not see the sun that night, but I could know it was there by the light reflected off the moon. And Jesus can send Mary to give me comfort and direction; she can be the source of great joy as she witnesses to and leads me to her Son; the Son she gave birth to on Christmas morning.

Mary and the Holy Family are very much at the forefront of our thoughts during this Advent season. And on Thursday we celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. In 1858, during one of her appearances to St. Bernadette, Mary identified herself by saying, "***I am the Immaculate Conception.***" When Bernadette told this to the priest, he knew Bernadette was telling the truth about the apparitions; she couldn't have made this up. Through Mary's appearances, the faithful witness of Bernadette, and the healings that occurred at Lourdes, many came to believe in Mary's Son, Jesus.

And tomorrow we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mary appeared as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, and so the Hispanic community has a special devotion to this feast. But Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness of all the Americas, not just Mexico. We all need to keep a place in our hearts for this devotion. When Mary appeared to Juan Diego back in 1531, the bishop did not believe him and asked for a sign. And so on a cold December day, Mary instructed Juan to pick Castillian roses from the hilltop and place them in his cloak and take them to the bishop as a sign. You see, it was not the season for roses, and this particular type of rose was not native to the area. These two facts made the roses miraculous in themselves. But there was more. When Juan Diego opened his cloak for the bishop, the roses fell out. But on his cloak was the image of Our Lady, and the bishop fell to his knees. The original cloak, called a tilma, is still on display just outside Mexico City at the basilica almost 500 years later. It is made of a

natural material that should have decayed within 10 or 20 years. And so the miracle continues each and every day. Through Mary's appearance and Juan Diego's faithful witness, hundreds of thousands of pagans were brought to Christianity. And because this conversion helped put an end to much of the human sacrifice that they had practiced, Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe is also referred to as the patroness of pro-life issues and of the unborn.

And in our gospel this morning we hear that just like the moon, just like Mary, John the Baptist is not the light, but he came to testify to the light. And that light, of course, is Jesus. John came to testify to the coming of Jesus and to prepare His way, just as the moon foreshadows the rising of the sun in the morning. And for the people this was a time to rejoice; their long awaited Messiah was at hand. John announced His coming.

And we hear from St. Paul about the importance of rejoicing. He says: ***“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”***

And in our responsorial psalm this morning, we heard Mary's words from the Magnificat: ***“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant.”***

And this is how we should pray and how we should live our lives, praising God and giving Him thanks; being a people of joy. We all know good Christians who always go moping around, who always seem sad or mad at the world. They go to church often and pray a lot, but they just never seem to be happy. They are always finding something wrong, because they are always looking. These people, devout and pious as they may be, are not reflecting back the light of Christ. They will not attract others to come and follow Jesus.

Bernadette and Juan Diego reflected the light of Jesus that they received from Mary and many saw the straight path more clearly. In a way, they were like the snow. We have the image of Jesus as the sun and Mary as the moon, but we can be like the snow to reflect the light we receive from Mary to help light up the whole world so that other will find joy; so they others can better find the right path in a world that often seems so dark.

There is a lot of evil and sadness in the world that we should not ignore, but we cannot let it overwhelm us. We need to fight a good fight to correct injustices and to steer the moral compass of our country in the right direction, but we must do it in a spirit of peace and joy. If we do not reflect the Light of Christ, others will not follow. Be pleasant to those who you might not like or agree with. Share your beliefs in a positive manner and don't express anger when they don't understand or agree. Go out into the workplace, into your school, into your homes this week with a big smile on your face and a kind word on your lips. Be a person full of joy. And others will want the peace that you have. Let them see by your example that Jesus is in your heart. Rejoice in God your savior and give Him thanks, for He has looked upon us, His lowly servants, and He has done great things for us.

Cover the world like a blanket of snow. Light up the world by sharing and reflecting the Light of Christ you have received through Mary and the Church. And there will be peace on earth.

Deacon Joe Hulway