Advent Reflections

on the Collect* of the Mass for the Third Sunday of Advent

The Third Sunday of Advent begins with the Entrance Antiphon: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near. It is that nearness to the Christmas feast that brings the Church a new joy today. Lines 1 & 2 of this Collect have that perspective: the Church is waiting for the Lord’s Nativity celebration, so that we can enter anew into the mystery of the Incarnation of the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity. But we are not waiting in the manner of the secular world – which really isn’t waiting for anything, but merely wants an excuse to celebrate in a very worldly manner, to shop for gifts, to listen to Christmas music, etc. No, the Church is waiting “faithfully”, that is, with faith. This phrase in line 2 means that we recognize that the Incarnation can be fully grasped and appreciated only with faith. What the season of Advent does try to stir up our faith, so that we will not lose a sacred and spiritual perspective on Christmas in the face of the secular onslaught of materialism and superficial happiness. In this, we are praying much as we are certain Mary prayed in the last days and weeks of her pregnancy: awaiting the coming of Jesus, having faith that the Word of the angel will be fulfilled in His birth.

Faith is clearly what is animating the petitions that appear in lines 3 & 4, and then in lines 5 & 6. Line 4 shows the faith of the Church: may the kind of joy filling our hearts be centered not on “what Santa is going to bring me this Christmas”, but on the core of the Mystery we celebrate – the salvation of the whole world, which began in the Incarnation of the 2nd Person in Jesus Christ. This salvation was not centered on me, not centered even on the Church alone; rather, it is so great that it is for every person throughout all time and space and history, everyone in the world.

Lines 5 & 6 again show a contrast with the world’s kind of celebrations and “Christmas parties” already taking place. Those parties are usually filled with superficial happiness, stimulated by drinking and drugs, by much noise and empty talk. Our “party”, our celebration as Church, will take place in “solemn worship”, especially that of the upcoming Solemnity on December 25, as well as its continuation on through the Solemnity of Epiphany and beyond.

Line 6 in its petition shows that the Church wants the rejoicing that starts at solemn worship then to be carried outside of the churches to fill our daily lives and the lives of those around us. When a drink or a drug is inside us, we may experience a certain kind of happiness, at least for a little while. But when the Presence of Jesus is renewed within us, as at a Solemnity such as Christmas, then we have “glad rejoicing” that goes on and on, no matter the physical or spiritual setbacks an individual might be experiencing. Thus, the Collect prays out of a spirit of faith; it also prays for a renewal of that faith, so that our lives may be characterized by divine joy.

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.

Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent

*The Collect is the prayer that comes immediately before the first reading.

Reflection by Abbot Marcel Rooney, OSB. This may be reprinted for use within the Diocese of Madison. Outside of the Diocese of Madison, please email worship@straphael.org.