



December 17, 2023

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Gaudete "Rejoice" Sunday

"A voice of one crying in the desert..." Mark 1:3



Dear Friends;

At the time of the first Advent, Rome controlled much of the Mediterranean world. Rome ruled Judea and the surrounding provinces. After decades of war, Rome had a major victory and defeated Egypt. The known world was united under the Roman banner. No one had ever achieved this before. Caesar inaugurated the Pax Romana (Roman Peace). This led many to declare Caesar "Savior of the World."

What made some see Caesar as a savior was the kind of peace that benefited the few (the top one percent) while exploiting the many. The Empire usurped the land, harvests, and means of production from poor families. The people became tenants on their own land. Those with any income paid tribute to Caesar, taxes to the local king or governor, and tithes to support the temple created debt. The first century version of loan sharks preyed on the poor. What looked to a few well-off people like a world of peace, kept most people in economic distress by imperial design.

Why would God choose this time to enter human history through the incarnation of Jesus? Just as the imperial elites announce world peace, God begins a counter-campaign. The vision of God's peace will not rely on oppression, violence, or war. The reign of God will not turn people out of their homes, or ancestral lands. God's peace would be good news for the poor and will cause anxiety for the powerbrokers of empire. God's Peace comes as good news or hard news depending on your social circumstances.

God's peace will bring a great reversal of people's fortunes. John the Baptist heralds the coming change. John was the son of a country priest. He was a blessing to old parents who were thought to be barren (considered a great curse in this culture). His birth reversed the shame his parents felt. His arrival would also arouse hope among the people in the Judean hills. Unusual and unexpected births always herald God doing something new. What will he be Elijah come again, or the Messiah, or the "prophet?"

The son of the country priest, Zechariah, John experienced the plight of his people. He saw them as his father ministered to the people. When it was the turn of Zechariah to serve in the Temple, he witnessed the opulent lives of the high priests in the city. Their lifestyles paid for by the Temple tithes most could scarcely afford to pay.

What further excited the people's expectations is John does not follow in his father's vocation. This is not normal in this culture. He became a prophetic preacher of God's coming justice. He denounces the lifestyles of the rich and powerful whose excess is funded by the poor. Standing at the site where Israel first entered the Land of the Promise, he baptizes. His baptism says we need to be purified. We need to start over. We need to remake society as God would form it with equity and justice.

John will say he is not the Messiah. He merely points the way to the coming kingdom. But when he comes the Messiah will radically change the order of everything. It will be a world transformed by non-violent, merciful loving kindness. And it is just what we need. John calls us to look for change and live that change now.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church