

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 3-C (Homily 02)
“Joyful, Transformative Love”
(Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12; Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18)

What happens when you put a piece of paper in a glass of water? Nothing really – the paper simply gets soaked and soggy.

What happens when you hold a piece of paper over a lit candle? Transformation – the paper bursts into flame, burns up and leaves only ashes behind.

Rejoice and be glad, for the love of Christ is transformative.

According to the ancient tradition of the church, this third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudate Sunday*. The reason for this is obvious – both the first and second readings speak strongly of rejoicing, even exulting, due to the transforming presence of God in our lives.

The first reading from the prophet Zephaniah is literally a mini-course on salvation. We are encouraged to rejoice, yes, even exult, because our God is like a divine warrior, not of military might, but of love in our midst. Zephaniah goes on to describe the work of this divine warrior as forgiveness and healing. Our God, this mighty warrior of love, has *taken away judgment* (forgiven us) and has *turned away our enemies* (healed us). Forgiven of all our sins, and healed of our sinfulness (our defects of character that make us sin), we have every reason to rejoice.

The Gospel delves deeper into the source of this joy, and it centers on the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. The question posed to John the Baptist is the right question. The crowds, the tax collectors and even the soldiers ask, “What must we do?” And John replies rightly that their behavior must change.

The problem lies in how to bring about behavioral change. John could only give advice on how to act and invite people to change – his baptism in water could not make it happen. But John announced that one was coming who would do what John could not to, and that is to transform us from within by a different kind of baptism. The cause of this change and transformation will

be the Holy Spirit of Jesus, who will radically change our lives, like a forest fire that destroys what is dead and dying and sets the stage for new life.

The second reading from Philippians seconds the message of the first reading. Rejoice, for the Lord is near. Have faith, trust in Jesus, pray to him at all times, allow him to transform us and we will experience peace and joy, two outstanding gifts of the Spirit that go far beyond transitory emotions.

I experienced a taste of this inner transformative power of the Spirit through prayer one day as a young priest in Beauval. It was Friday of a busy week, and I had just learned that a busload of grade eleven students from the Convent in North Battleford was coming up for a sports event and they wanted the local parish to help organize their stay. I felt a bit overwhelmed with everything on my plate but decided to be faithful to my hour of prayer despite all that there was to do. The text I turned to was today's passage from Philippians. I will never forget how all my anxiety, stress and worry melted away as I pondered those words, *Rejoice, the Lord is near, do not worry about anything*. What replaced those painful emotions was a profound peace and joy, and I was able to carry on with a completely different attitude and with gratitude for the gift of faith in Jesus and the power of his Spirit to transform our lives.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a celebration of transformative faith. Humble gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. More important, we who receive these gifts are in turn transformed into his Body and sent out into the world to take that Good News to others.

So today, as we continue to celebrate *Gaudate Sunday*, let us rejoice and be glad, for the love of Christ is transformative.