

3rd Sunday of Advent 1985



“Sing in your cell, small anchoress,
What secret syllable
Woke your young faith to the mad truth
That an unborn baby could be washed in the Spirit of God?
Oh, burning joy!
What seeds of life were planted by that voice?
With what new sense
Did your wise heart receive her Sacrament
And know he cloistered Christ?”...lines from Merton’s poem,
“The Quickening of John the Baptist.”

“What seeds of life were planted by that voice...?”

“Of all women you are the most blessed and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the Mother of my Lord? For, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy.” And Mary said:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoiced in God, my Savior.”

Joy is one of the seeds/characteristics of the experience of God. Joy is a mark of both dispensations, that of prophecy and that of fulfillment.

John the Baptist stands in between the two dispensations and heralds that joy.



John stands on the banks of the river Jordan baptizing. River is symbol for the meeting between heaven and earth, water, the symbol of new life. The long expected one has come; the joy of fulfillment is upon us. “Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promises made her by the Word would be fulfilled.”

Fulfillment brings joy. “Shout for joy, daughter of Zion.”

“Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem.”

“Cry out with joy and gladness for among you is the great and the Holy One of Israel.”

Or as Paul tells us, “Rejoice, again I say rejoice. I repeat, I want your happiness.”

“What seeds of life were planted by that voice? The tree of Paradise has been renewed; the tree of life of the first garden, lost to humanity is now in the middle of the garden, in the middle of history – for that tree is Christ, the life-giving Word – the alpha of Eden, the Omega of heaven, and in the middle, in the whole world’s midpoint, the redeeming tree rises from Adam’s grave, the water of life flowing beside it.

Happy indeed are they who follow
Not in the way of sinners...for
They are like a tree that is planted
Beside the flowing waters,
That yields its fruit in due season
And whose leaves shall never fade.
Not so are the wicked, not so!
For they like winnowed chaff
Which shall be driven away by the wind...

John heralds the seeds of new life – for the tree is a symbol for that vital force of the very life of God. Every springtime the tree announces the rebirth of nature. Cut down, it shoots up again. In arid places, the tree marks places where water allows life. The tree nurtures us with its fruits. John heralds the seeds of new life, the fruits of fulfillment.

No longer take possession: “If anyone has two tunics, let them share” ...take care instead. No longer take for granted, but give thanks. “Exact no more than your rate.”
No longer take offense, “Forgive.” “No intimidation.” “No extortion.” “Be content.”
“They are like a tree that is planted beside the flowing water, yielding fruit in due season.”
“Christ is the tree of life that will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
“His winnowing fan is in his hand.”

“Christ has borne our faults in his own body, on the tree of the cross...so that we might live for holiness.”

He has cancelled every debt we had to pay, by nailing it to the tree of the cross.
Oh, “Crux fidelis.” “Oh, faithful cross.” The tree that brought and sealed the meeting between heaven and earth – “for he did not cling to his equality with God, but humbled himself.”

Can I take on the disposition of humility, “not fit to undo the sandal strap” and find the joy of fulfillment?

How often we have reflected on Meister Eckhart’s saying: “The Father is ever begetting his Son in our hearts.” “Sing in your cell, small anchorite.” Sing in the cell of my heart, Oh, Christ, Oh, Crux fidelis. With what new sense can my heart receive his Sacrament and know he cloistered Christ? Can I rejoice and celebrate this sacrament of forgiving, taking care, giving thanks?