

## THE POWER OF HOPE: 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY ADVENT B

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Isaiah says: *'my soul rejoices in my God.'* Paul writes: *'[God] will not fail you.'* John preaches: *'He's already among you, the Light of the World.'* All three want to give us hope, Advent hope.

A cynic might say hope doesn't help. *'It's nice to feel hopeful,'* the grumpy cynic might say, *'but it's too thin. You can't buy anything with hope. It only means that you don't already have what you want.'* On the contrary, hope is so important that it can even mean the difference between life and death.

Someone you love is seriously ill. She's so sick that she has gone to hospital. The doctors say that she would come through, if only her attitude was positive, i.e. if only she would want and hope to live. Every time you visit her, she turns her face away and says: *'Go away, leave me alone! I'm finished! I can feel it in my bones!'* You try to cheer her up. You speak about things you might do together. Go to a party or out to dinner, visit a mutual friend, or take a trip overseas! But there's no reaction, no interest at all.

The doctors say: *'We are afraid she's slipping away. She has no will to live, no hope in her heart.'* So she nearly stops eating altogether. Every day she becomes weaker, thinner, and paler. If she doesn't pick up her spirits and start wanting and hoping to live she really will die. Without that will from within all the operations, radiations, chemicals, pills, powders, injections, and pep talks, won't make a scrap of difference. Slowly but surely she will waste away and die.

We too need hope for our world and hope for our own lives. Think of the homeless in our cities, of the prisoners of conscience in filthy jails, of the babies born to alcoholic parents, of the depressed and desperate young people thinking seriously about taking their own lives. Think of the difficulties in your own family around your own dining table.

Think of the sufferings of millions of people around the world at the present time. Among the many causes of their sufferings are drought and drastic food shortages; fanaticism, civil unrest and wars; the scourge of the Ebola virus, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; corrupt and incompetent governments; and low levels of development. Think especially of the present sufferings of people in the central region of the Philippines who have been slammed with a second deadly typhoon, so soon after the previous one cut its path of death and destruction.

In all such difficult situations, our own and those of others, do we just feel sad and sorry? Do we even come to the conclusion that there is no way out, no hope? Not if we take the word of God seriously. Isaiah says: *'my soul rejoices in my God.'* Paul writes: *'[God] will not fail you.'* John preaches: *'He's already among you, the Light of the World.'*

We believe so. We hope so. We pray so. We go on praying that everything will work out for ourselves and others, at least in the long run! And we do whatever we can to bring about

that better world that Jesus came among us to promote. A world where no one lives in poverty, where the hungry are fed, where the sick are nursed back to health, where wealth is distributed, where people feel and relieve the pain of their sisters and brothers, where education and jobs are available to all.

This is a world, in short, where the love of God makes all the difference, that tender and transforming love of God which changes people and changes situations, changes them for the better and changes them for the benefit of all, and not just for the fortunate few!

In these last days of Advent, then, you and I might think of both what we can do and what we will do for needy persons this Christmas, both here and overseas. We will also be on our guard about giving lots of presents to our families and friends, and especially costly presents, which, when all is said and done, nobody really wants and nobody really needs.

Let's ask ourselves, in short, how can we, like John the Baptist before us, be a witness to the light that is Jesus Christ, the Light of the World?

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(with some inspiration from writings of Joseph Donders)