

Fr. Ed's Corner

The Third Sunday of Advent

"I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul!"

The first reading for this Third Sunday of Advent announces a reality that all of us who have been Baptized and especially all of us who have been Confirmed have experienced: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me!" At the moment of our Baptism the Triune God began to indwell our souls and at the moment of our Confirmation, that indwelling was greatly strengthened as we made our own public "yes," acknowledging the "yes" that had been made for us by our parents so many years ago.

In virtue of these Sacraments we too can proclaim, "He has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice." We have been given great gifts by the King of Kings to enable us to draw closer to Him and to also enable us to work to build His Kingdom. These gifts have come to us through our various means of Encountering Him. What is our responsibility in terms of stewarding these gifts that we have been given?

First, there is the responsibility to fully receive the gift! When we are given something, we have to accept it, receive it, to truly make it our own. I'm reminded of how I used to approach Christmas morning when I was a younger kid. Sometimes I'd just look at the presents under the tree but be reluctant to open them because as long as they were there and I didn't open them, I could hope that they would be something really cool that I really wanted, and many times, that was true. But what if it was clothes or something practical that just wasn't fun? Not knowing what it was at least did not disappoint me. But sooner or later I'd get over my resistance (usually in 8-10 nanoseconds) and open the gifts.

Sometimes we treat the gifts of God the same way, "leaving them under the tree" as it were—grateful that they are there, but not really receiving them. It is common for many folks to treat the gifts of Confirmation that way, this introduction to Pentecost that is meant to change our lives. If we don't choose to fully receive it, if we leave it under the tree, it will never bear the fruit in our lives that the Lord Jesus intends. But, as the first reading pointed out, we have been given the Spirit. We therefore have a responsibility to receive the Spirit's gifts, to follow St. Paul's advice to Timothy: "fan into a flame the gifts that you were given!" In other words, we have a responsibility to grow.

"Grow" is the third dimension of our Christ the King Discipleship Pathway. Last weekend, we shared about "Encounter." All of us have encountered the Lord Jesus, sometimes in dramatic ways like through Pine Hills, Alpha, Cursillo, the Life in the Spirit Seminar, etc., etc., but more often in subtle ways that in themselves are still life changing, like receiving Him in Communion. Our commitment to grow is served by our utilizing the four pillars of spirituality that Pope St. John Paul the Great articulated: the charismatic, contemplative, Eucharistic, and Marian dimensions. To use each of them brings about the growth that the King intends for us.

We can powerfully assist each other in this. For example, families regularly praying over each other for more of the power of the Holy Spirit can greatly enhance each family member's reception of that Holy Spirit and so better empower them to deal with all the serious challenges of this interesting time. To respond to the Bishop's invitation to us to share with him in this Year of the Bible is another great way to enable ourselves to grow. Various discipleship groups and other opportunities that we will be sharing over the next weeks will give us other options to truly enhance our growth, accepting and using these different gifts that we have been given.

Often we suffer because we don't fully yield to all the gifts that the Lord Jesus has for us to enable us to walk with joy through this troubling time. But like all His gifts, they come with invitations, not coercions; they must be received and cooperated with to be fully effective in our lives. With humility and gratitude, let us receive all He has given us! Even so, come, Lord Jesus come! – *Fr. Ed Fride*