

Homily for the Third Sunday of Advent

December 16, 2012, 7:30 AM Mass • St. Rose of Lima Church, Newtown, CT

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Never before has the Massacre of the Holy Innocents taken place before the Birth of Christ. But that is what has happened in Newtown.

With our broken hearts we are looking for some consolation. The Gospel today wants to give it to us.

“The people were filled with expectation....”

The Gospel says that great crowds of people went out to see John the Baptist who was baptizing by the Jordan River. And it says that “the people were filled with expectation.”

I don’t know if you were here at St. Rose for the vigil Mass on Friday night, but the church was totally packed with people standing in the aisles—and there was an equal number of people standing outside. There must have been well over a thousand people at Mass!

And as I looked at them I asked myself: *Why are they here? What are they looking for?*

They were *filled with expectation*...the expectation that there was Something More than the atrocious evil that had befallen them...Something More than the darkness...Something More than despair.

Where did that expectation come from? It is not delusional! That expectation is a *gift*! Someone had put it in their heart. And that is why the most reasonable thing they could do in the face of such unspeakable anguish was to follow their heart and come to Church...to come and be in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, to be together with other believers, and worship God. That *act of hope* was the only adequate response to the horror of the day’s earlier events.

For that expectation made them want to be one with *the Source, the Giver* of the expectation—God! And in finding Him we know that evil does not win! Darkness does not have the last word! We are filled with expectation for Something More because God intends to give us Something More. And we know that God will not let us down!

What is that Something More? *Joy!*

You’re probably wondering why the priest and deacon today look like a couple of Easter eggs dressed as we are in these pink vestments. And that is because today is *Gaudete* Sunday—the Sunday of rejoicing. But how do we rejoice in the face of so much sorrow?

Before the Mass you heard read to you a letter that our Holy Father himself, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote to you. The Pope was thinking about the people of St. Rose!

And do you know what Pope Benedict says about joy? He says that only one thing makes genuine joy possible. You know what that is? It is *having an answer to the question of death!* And we have that! We have lost those whom we love, but we know that they are living forever with God.

The certainty of joy is that evil cannot dominate us, that love wins. As someone said just before Mass, St. Rose now has saints in heaven.

“What is it that we should do?”

As different people approach John the Baptist in the Gospel today, they ask him, “What is it that we should do?” That same question is heavy on our hearts today as well, because an atrocity like this leaves us feeling utterly powerless.

With us this morning at Mass is the husband of a teacher who was killed. And he has children. So one thing we have to do is surround them with our love. We have to reach out to that family in every conceivable way. We have to pray for those children, and to pray hard so that any darkness, or doubt, or fear that may be strangling their hearts will be pierced by a Light and a Love that raises them up and helps them to keep going.

I am also thinking about the shooter.

I am astonished that no one could see how lost this young man was. It is hard to believe that that kind of pain, the fact of being so lost was something he could conceal.

All of us have to be deeply united and pay attention to those whom God puts on our path who are hurting. If someone had just paid that kind of attention to this man, perhaps history would have been different. Maybe his life could have been saved along with the lives of so many others.

Because that is the meaning of life. That’s what it means to be human: to give ourselves in sacrifice to those who are hurting and lost, and to help them. Life is hard! People are fragile! We need to look into the eyes of the people who are in front of us and dare to see their hurt, their wounds. To be human means to take that kind of initiative with others—to take a risk in loving them.

Especially our young people. We do not realize deeply enough the kind of pressure, and pain, and despair, and loneliness that the world imposes on young people today. They are assaulted from every side by things that keep them from being happy and that can make them self-destructive. We have to help them, reach out to them when they feel alienated or alone. We have to be their friends.

I was talking to a man who was praying in the church this morning at 6:00 am; someone had said to him that Christmas should be canceled this year. No: Christmas *will not* be canceled! We need Christmas more than ever! Because the *only way* that we can make sense of this horror is if God himself becomes flesh and comes to dwell among us as our Friend. We need the Presence of Jesus Christ in our midst to rescue us from this misery.

For who has ever looked at us the way that that Man looks at us? Our Christmas mission is to give that same gaze of love to every person whom God places on our path. We can rescue others who are lost because Someone already came to us when *we* were lost and loved us back to life. To be a Catholic means to live our life as a sacrificial *act of love*: to seek out those who are so deeply wounded and share the divine love of Jesus Christ.

“All the people were asking in their hearts [about] John....”

In the Gospel today, the eyes of all the people are on John the Baptist because of his exceptional humanity. They are asking themselves whether John might be the Christ.

Today the eyes of all the world are fixed on this little town, Newtown. They are looking for something from us, and we must give it to them.

John the Baptist promises those who are looking at him, “One mightier than I is coming.”

And to those whose eyes are fixed on us we say: One mightier than this horrific evil...mightier than darkness...than sorrow...than fear...One mightier than despair is coming.

We have to let all the world see the faith of the people of the parish of St. Rose of Lima. For this faith, that has been so apparent to many during these last few heart-wrenching days, is not something new for the people of this church. It is not something made up...something recently put on. Your Catholic faith is *who you are*; your faith defines you. I can attest to this personally because of the profound way your faith has transformed my own life.

Your faith is what makes *you* exceptional. And that is what will help the world to know that Christ is real. Who knows: out of this atrocity may come worldwide conversions.

For all the world needs to know that *faith is not optional*. Catastrophic events like this make it painfully clear that the human heart is a longing for meaning, peace, truth...is a longing for love that is *Infinite*. Faith is not optional because it is only there, in the acknowledgement of the existence of God, that we can find the answer to this endless, aching need that we are.

That is why the most reasonable thing we can do is live that faith in love. We must give the world our *certainty*...the certainty that comes from knowing that we belong to Jesus Christ!

In ten days Jesus will come through his Blessed Mother Mary as our Savior to save us. But we beg—with all our sorrow, with all our agony and pain, with our broken hearts, with all our anger and rage, with all our fear and our feelings of being abandoned—we beg in an *act of faith*, “O, You who are coming to be our Savior, come and save us *right now*. Jesus, we believe in you! We have faith in you! We trust in you! Save us right now, for we are lost and we cannot save ourselves!”

We, the Catholic Christians of St. Rose of Lima Parish, say to the world: Come and join us in our faith.

In the words of the Communion Antiphon for today’s Mass: “*Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.*”