

Father O'Connor's Homily for 15 December 2024
Third Sunday of Advent-C

Zephaniah 3: 14-18a
Philippians 4: 4-7
Luke 3: 10-18

After each Mass this weekend at Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes, there will be an information session – along with refreshments – to learn more about the Angel Scholarship Fund. The Angel Scholarship Fund is a great opportunity for you to direct your Ohio income tax dollars to a Catholic school – which we hope is Saint Joseph Parish School here in Amherst – at no cost to you. Ohio taxpayers are eligible for tax credits up to \$750 individually or \$1,500 if you file a joint return.

Steve Frankart – along with some fine refreshments – will be available in the Social Hall right after Mass to provide information on how you can participate in our goal to raise \$250,000 in Angel Scholarship Funds for our Saint Joseph Parish School. You can help to reach our goal and make a lasting impact – and at no financial cost to you. I encourage you to stop by. And I thank you for your support.

It is right there in today's Gospel – that question that we human beings have been asking since time began: "What should we do?"

Sometimes the question is about small things like, "What should I wear today?" Or, "What should we have for dinner?" Sometimes, though, the question is about really big things like, "What should we say to our children who no longer go to church, or who say they don't believe in God anymore?"

"What should we do?"

We are in good company today with the people who posed that question to John the Baptist. They knew they needed to make some changes in their lives. And they knew that John the Baptist would give them straight answers to their question, "What should we do?"

To the first group John the Baptist replies, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise."

Where do we fit with this? Think for a moment about how many coats, how many jackets, how many sweaters you have right now that maybe you haven't worn in a while and perhaps don't even have room to store.

Saint Basil the Great said, "The unused coat in your closet belongs to the person who right now is cold." Maybe we can share some of our clothing and food items to help keep someone else warm and nourished this winter.

The tax collectors ask him, "John, what about us? What should we do?" John very simply responds, "Stop collecting more than is prescribed."

What does that mean for us who may be tempted to save and store so much "just in case we might need it one day"? Maybe God is nudging us to get serious about the Bible-based prescription of tithing: giving 10% of my income back to God out of gratitude for His blessings, with 5% going to the Church and with 5% going to other charities, to enable God to bless other people through me.

I remember someone being shocked when I suggested that he consider tithing his earnings. "Ten percent?" he exclaimed. "That's a lot!"

To which I replied, "Well then think how huge the ninety percent is that you get to keep!"

The soldiers ask, "What about us? What should we do?" John the Baptist says, "Do not practice extortion. Do not falsely accuse anyone. And be satisfied with your wages."

What does that have to do with us? Well, how do I use my speech? More to criticize others? Or more to build other people up? Am I greedy and envious, or am I grateful for and satisfied with what I have received, and ready to share a portion of my blessings with others?

"What should we do?" Or a better way to ask is, "What should I do?"

Often we know very well that fault we need to work on – and people around us may know it very well too. But sometimes there are faults known only to us and to God. We try to keep them secret. Maybe they are embarrassing or make us feel ashamed. And yet, with God's grace, we need to work on them too because they get in the way of our becoming even better versions of ourselves – the version that God has in mind for us to be.

"What should I do?"

This short story from Native American wisdom points us in the right direction. It is about an Indian grandfather who was giving some advice to

his Indian-brave grandson. He said, "Inside each person there are two wolves: one is a wolf of love and generosity, while the other is a wolf of anger and greed. They battle within us all the time."

The boy asked, "Grandpa, which wolf will win?"

The grandfather's response would have made John the Baptist smile with approval. He said, "Which wolf will win? Whichever wolf we feed."

Saint John the Baptist was one of the world's supremely effective preachers. John the Baptist preached action and produced action. A preacher was once complimented on a sermon that he delivered. His response was: "Thank you. But what did it do?"

"What should we do?" "Lord, what should I do?" Help me to know what it is, and then give me the grace to do it.