

Gratitude in a World Full of Bad News
Advent 3B

World is full of bad news.

- Auto industry on the rocks.
- Corruption on Wall Street leads to 700 Billion in Bail Outs
- Stock Market Crashing.
- Corruption in the Illinois governor's office.
- Wars continue in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Threat of nuclear Iran and North Korea.
- Attacks in India. Continuing conflict with Pakistan.
- Genocide in Darfur.
- Riots in Greece.
- Remains of 3 year old Casey Anthony found. Mom charged with her murder.

Closer to home:

- Fire leaves Bath family homeless.
- Drug addiction, alcoholism ruin lives.
- Domestic violence shatters families.
- Hundreds of Bath area kids eligible live in poverty.

Yet the scriptures tell me to "Rejoice and be glad"
because the Lord has "anointed me" and called me to
"Prepare the way of the Lord."

- to bring glad tidings to the poor,
- to heal the brokenhearted,
- to proclaim liberty to the captives
- and release to the prisoners,
- to announce a year of favor from the LORD.

The Scriptures tell me that,
in spite of all the Bad News out there –
I can "Rejoice heartily in the Lord always" because
"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me"
And "God is the joy of my soul."

That's why if I tell you today that there is good news
or preach to you about the importance of gratitude –
I risk being "A voice crying out in the wilderness."

But, this morning I am called to be just that. And so are you.

For in spite of all the bad news,

Today I can still “rejoice heartily in the LORD,
in my God who is the joy of my soul;”

For the Lord’s works are not completed
and the Spirit of the Lord remains at work in the world.
“Goodness and kindness still flow from the hearts of many
and acts of charity and good will abound.

Each time we proclaim the Gospel,
we pray that the Good news of the Lord

- remain in our minds
- that we speak it from our lips
- We can do that only
if the Good news is firmly implanted in our hearts.

And for the Good News to be embedded in our hearts,
We must allow the person of Jesus Christ, God with us –
to be embedded there first.

And, as St. Paul tells us in today’s 2nd Reading,
The way to embed Jesus in our heart is to . . .

- “Pray without ceasing” and to
- “In all circumstances - give thanks.”
- “Do not quench the Spirit.”
- Do not be cynical about prophetic utterances about
God’s Spirit being at work - even in the midst of chaos.
- “Test everything; retain what is good.
Refrain from every kind of evil.”

Over the past few weeks at St. Mary’s,
we’ve been inviting parishioners to
witness from our pulpit as to

- how their faith has grown
- and their lives have been changed
- through a growing relationship with Christ
- and the friendships and support they have received as members of our parish family.

Through these talks and the testimonies
of others who have written bulletin articles -

we hope to broaden our concept of Stewardship to encompass

- not just our responsibility to financially support the parish,
- but to see our Stewardship of the Good News

as truly the way of life for all Christians.

- a way of life based on a life encompassing interactive relationship between God, our parish and its members.

Through this relationship,
each of us put our time, our talents,
and our financial resources into a collective pot
so as to create an even more effective voice
for bringing the Christian messages of
hope, freedom and justice
to a people whose vision of life
is so enmeshed in the world's troubles and bad news
that they are incapable of understanding and experiencing
the liberating Good News
that our faith has engendered in us.

Let me conclude with an African story that illustrates
Just how important it is that each of us
who have been given the gift of faith
add our unique gifts of time, talent and treasure
to this essential work.

According to the story,
a certain king was to visit a village under his rule
and the villagers all decided
to contribute a jar of wine for the royal feast.
All the wine was to be poured into a big barrel
from which it would be served.

One man thought to himself:
"With all the people in the village each pouring a jar of wine
into the barrel, what difference would it make
if I poured in a jar of water and save my wine.
A jar of water among so much wine would hardly make any difference.

Unfortunately, he was not the only one in the village who thought that way.
When the king arrived and the barrel of wine
was ready to be served, it was discovered
to be full of water and very little wine.

Many others in the village had also contributed water instead of wine,
thinking that it would not matter,
since other people's contributions
would make up for their not contributing.

It did matter. It does matter.

As you consider the Good News
that your faith in Jesus Christ has brought to your life,

And, as you consider the many, many people,
perhaps even some in your own family,
who at present – can hear only the bad news,
May your heart be moved to never hold back on adding
your very best wine to the mix.

And may you never forget the Good News
that Paul's faith allowed him to share . . .

“May the God of peace make you perfectly holy
and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body,
be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls you is faithful,
and he will also accomplish it.”