

December 16, 2012—Third Sunday of Advent: Year C, Lectionary 9

Basic Question: How can our lives be filled with joy right now?

Central Idea: We can experience some of the peace and joy of salvation now, on the condition that we purify our hearts. **Doctrine:** Purity of heart. **Practical Application:** Having purity of heart and acting for a right intention.

Central Idea—We can experience some of the joy and peace of salvation even now on the condition that we purify our hearts

- **First Reading and Responsorial Psalm:** Because God has become man and redeemed us by forgiving our sins and giving us the promise of eternal happiness in heaven, we should be filled with joy. We all need salvation and we have it! Full salvation will be ours in the next life but it can begin now. Jesus Christ is near us—as near as we want him to be.
- **Second Reading:** St. Paul speaks of peace. What is it?
 - The opposite of peace is our natural, fallen condition. Ever since the Garden of Eden, people have been alienated from God, filled with inner conflicts, and suspicious and afraid of other people and of the dangers in the natural world. In addition, people are aware that they cause harm to other people. Selfishness and anxiety are ingrained in us in our fallen condition.
 - Through the Redemption, which restores us to a right relationship with God, ourselves, other people, and the natural world, we can anticipate *now* what it will be like in heaven always: No longer afraid or suspicious of anyone else or of the natural world and reconciled with God so we are friends again. Can anything really harm us *now* if we stay united to Christ in every circumstance? We can experience peace *now* because we are saved. And we can also show kindness to others.
- **Gospel:** In the Gospel reading, St. John the Baptist shows us the condition necessary to meet Christ. It is basically the way of justice (Mt 21:32): Just do the right thing for the right reason.

Doctrine—The concept of purity of heart

- Purity of heart means to will just one thing (Søren Kierkegaard said this). This is hard to do because we all want many things. It is hard to know what that one thing should be. Even if you intend to will just one thing you can become discouraged because it may seem impossible to get.
- If you really do will one thing, what happens to everything else that attracts you? The one thing arranges everything else around it. For example, if your “one thing” is to win an Olympic gold medal, then that goal determines how you spend your time, what you eat, and your relationships with others.
- What is the best “one thing” that can be our goal? Jesus Christ answered this when he said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. Purity of heart, as he meant it, is that right intention or sincerity that puts God first and judges everything else in relationship to God. Jesus Christ had this singleness of intention and he *did* see God: he possessed from the moment of his conception the Beatific Vision—God’s infinite self-knowledge of his being,

truth, goodness, beauty, and love—everything he is—and of every one and everything he has created. Those who are pure in heart are able to see God imperfectly even in this life and will see him face-to-face in the next. This is our biggest reason for joy in this life: that we see God a little bit even now.

- Having a right intention of loving God above all carries over into every other good thing we can pursue, like how to love our neighbor properly, how to be a good spouse and parent, and how to be a good worker and citizen. The right intention of love for God also rules out all evil goals and bad means to good ends.
 - Just to look at one of St. John the Baptist's examples, a soldier's job is to defend his country under his commander's authority. A soldier with a right intention does just that. It is even better if the right intention is the purity of heart of wanting to please God by your actions as a soldier. John the Baptist points out some wrong intentions soldiers are prone to, like using their power to bully people out of money or goods.

Practical Application—Growing in purity of heart

- It is easy to *say* I want to do God's will above all else. However, underneath I may really prefer other things. Thus, we have to get to know ourselves. Depending on how old we are and how insightful we are it could be a process of discovery. For example, you might discover that regardless of what you *say*, you really want security, or acceptance, or admiration, or to stay out of trouble, or get sex, or to make money. If you are married, your spouse probably knows what really drives you. If you are a child, your parents can probably tell you, too. Do you dare to ask?
- We need a life of prayer to grow in purity of heart. In our prayer we ask God for the purity of heart to prefer him to all things. In our prayer we get to know God better so we *will* prefer him to all things. This takes time.
- Conversion of heart is the long process of growing to want what God wants. Our heart rebels all the time. Often, our attitude is *I want God to give me what I want* rather than *I want to give God what he wants*. What we don't understand is *What I really want deep down* is actually what God wants to give me: himself.
- If purity of heart means wanting only one thing and that one thing is God, then I have to keep reorienting my will. I have to think of myself like the soldier or tax collector who questioned John the Baptist. If I am a wife and mother, what should I do? If I am a child, what should I do? If I am a plumber, what should I do? John would answer, do the right thing. Here are some examples of living purity of heart.
 - If I am a student and I have Math homework, I do it carefully and completely.
 - If it is my job to vacuum the carpet, I do it properly, moving furniture I am supposed to. When I'm done I clean out the canister and wind up the cord and put the machine away.
 - If I am married and my spouse is talking to me, I listen carefully.
 - If I am an employer and one of my employees needs to be corrected, I summon the courage and tact to do this clearly and kindly because that is my responsibility.
 - I do all these things they way they should be done as my way of showing love for God.