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## Rejoice in Hope

3rd Sunday in Advent

by: Marcellino D'Ambrosio



Moses' mission had taken him quite a distance. From the splendor of Pharaoh's palace, to leading Israel through the Red Sea, to wrestling with their stubbornness in the desert for forty years. How sad that he never made it across the Jordan! But God did give him a moment of consolation. He brought him up to the top of Mount Nebo and showed him the promised land.

John the Baptist had a similar mission. He proclaimed the imminent coming of the Kingdom and labored day in and day out to prepare the way. Yet, on a Sunday that is supposed to be about joy, we find him locked in a dismal dungeon, awaiting execution. He sends a message to his cousin, looking for a shred of hope. "Are you the one who is to come?"

The message sent back to him no doubt caused excitement to surge throughout his weary bones. The prophecy of Is 61 had been fulfilled: the blind see, cripples walk, lepers are healed, the dead are raised, and to the poor is preached the good news. These are the marks of the anointed one, the messiah.

But though John had seen the messiah and heard of these wonderful works, he, like Moses, did not enter in during his lifetime. This is the meaning of the puzzling words of Jesus: "History has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptizer. Yet the least born into the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Mat 11:11)



John had only caught a glimpse of the first light before sunrise. For the dawn from on high did not break upon the world until Easter morning. The birth of Jesus and the wonderful teaching and miracles of his ministry were, like the preaching of God, but a preparation for the Kingdom of God, for the righteousness, peace, love, and joy that could only have been made possible by the Lord's death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit.

Who is the least born into the Kingdom who is greater than John? The little baby who is incapable of doing very much at all, but who through the saving waters of baptism, is born into the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). This baby is born not of woman, like John, but by water and the Holy Spirit. The greatness of this baby is a pure gift of God's grace, the gift of being an adopted son of God and temple of the Holy Spirit.

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It is good to pause a moment and think about the difference that Christ's first coming made. Old Covenant vs. New. Works vs. Grace. Written law vs. the law of the Spirit. Liberation from Pharaoh vs. liberation from Satan. An eye for an eye vs. the Sermon on the Mount.

It is also good to pause a moment to remember the difference between His first Coming and his Second. Mortality vs. immortality. The darkness of faith vs. the beatific vision. The valley of tears vs. unending joy.

While Christ's first coming transformed the meaning of suffering, it did not banish it. His Second Coming, however, will. At the sight of him riding upon the clouds, "sorrow and mourning will flee." (Is 35:10)

Yes, we have been saved. But we have not fully taken possession of it yet. We have tasted the first fruits, we have received the down-payment. But the rest is held for us in trust.

The confident anticipation of this inheritance is known as hope. This



unsung hero among the theological virtues is terribly important, because it makes patience possible. You can endure hardships cheerfully (Jas 5:7-10) only when the anticipated reward makes it all worthwhile.

Hope is also important because it is the key to joy. And that's why the third Sunday of Advent is known as "Gaudete" or "Rejoice" Sunday. The vestments change from penitential purple to rose because the suffering of this present age is as nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Moses rejoiced on Nebo. John rejoiced even in chains. In the midst of this valley of tears, let us Rejoice in Hope (Ro 12:12).



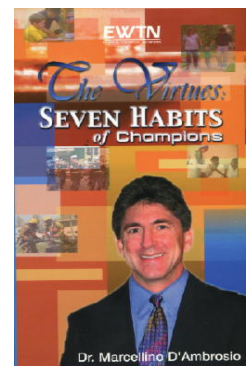
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