

DECEMBER 16 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

A prophet's mission was never a pleasant one.

They were ridiculed. They were not listened to. They were exiled. They were thrown into prison. Some even lost their lives.

And so, Zephaniah, when he had come to proclaim, he also felt that pressure.

Now, basically, in the time of the monarchs, until David and until the exile, the main job of the prophet was to tell the king not to make foreign alliances, to keep the Torah, not to adore the idols of the kings that worked with them.

Then, we have the exile. And then, when, after the exile, since there were no kings, the prophet would have to tell the people that they had to listen to the governors and to listen to the priests because the priests were supposed to offer sacrifices on behalf of them, the governor was supposed to take care of law and order.

So, here we have Zephaniah coming, but he's not there to—to scold the people. He does not go there to tell them about all the injustice that they have done. He does not whitewash them, but he's come to give hope and he's come to give courage. It is something that is so needed and so fit for this time of Advent.

There are so many of us who are discouraged and without hope, financial problems. Some of my friends have had very bad health problems—diagnosis of cancer, diagnosis of onsets of Alzheimer's, dementia, and all this, and how are they going to take care of them? And then, to add to that, you had the financial problem, not to mention all the wars that we hear on TV and in the news.

And so, when Zephaniah comes to tell them that God is taking care of the remnant, in Greek, they would say, "to kataleimma, to Israel," the remnant of Israel. And who were these remnant? These were the people, when taken into exile, still kept the Torah, still observed the Sabbath, still taught their children, circumcised the male children, and taught their children how to pray and to come closer to God.

Now, they had been scattered all over the whole diaspora, all the way to Egypt, all the way to Babylon in the north, all the way to Assyria. And God would gather them beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, the Omo, the Awash, the Boro. He would gather them together as a shepherd would gather his flock because the Lord says, "You are my chosen people. You are a royal race, you are a holy nation, a people set apart." God wanted them to realize that.

And it's the same message that you and I get during the season of Advent. We are told in the Letter to the Hebrews, the very beginning, that God had prepared the coming of the Messiah through the ages. And now, he is going to tell them, "Who are the people that are going to receive the Messiah?" First, the chosen people, the royal nation, the people set apart. But finally, salvation was for all people. And this is the call that you and I receive till today.

And so, it's not only a call to the people of Israel 2,000 years ago; it's a call that is here today and now. And the Prophet Zephaniah says all you have to do is trust in the Lord.

Now, Zephaniah is not telling us to have an attitude of passivity and say, "We'll do nothing," or as somebody says, "Que será, será, whatever will be, will be," or the other cliché that we fall into is, "Go with the flow." No, no, not exactly that. We are supposed to take charge and responsibility for our own salvation to the extent that the grace of God is

given to us. We can't sit down and say, "Grace, do your job." I have to cooperate with that job.

How do we do that? We get a good example of that in Psalm 1, where they are told that the just man does not walk in the company of sinners, does not keep the path of the wicked, and does not sit with scorners.

There's a gradation in all this. When somebody comes and talks to me, and I'm not fully involved in all that he or she has to say, and we are walking down the path, I will listen, I will be aware, but when they come to a fork in the road, they will go one way, I will go one way. There's no commitment.

The second part of the commitment is to keep the company of people. Is there a group of people that are dissidents, that are wicked, and I keep their company? And finally, the third sense is a sense of commitment; when I actually sit down and listen to a person that is doing evil. And so, this is exactly in Psalm 1. And Zephaniah says, "If you are the people of the Lord, trust in the Lord and avoid all these things."

Which brings us to the Gospel today. The Gospel today is very much—the eldest son is just like the just man. He does not want to do anything wrong. But the point is, in each one of us, there is a sense of limitedness, a sense of lassitude, a sense of, "Ahh, really? Do I have to do this?" And that is exactly what the son said. When the father said to him, "Go to the vineyard," he says, "No, I won't do." Actually, I thought of myself, if I went to my father and said, "No, I won't do," I'd get a size nine shoe where I didn't want to, you know?

But the point is, here was an example, a parable that Jesus was giving. One who said he did not want to, but then, when the crunch came, he realized that the goodness of his heart made him go out. And the second

are people that we meet in our everyday life, part of our own life, where we say yes and never fulfill it.

As Jesus comes into our world today, he's challenging us to do the same thing. "Come, follow me. I don't want volunteers. I want people who will walk in my path." God bless you all.