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Father Cantalamessa on Kindness

"A Balm in Human Relationships"

DEC. 15, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on this Sunday's liturgical readings.

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Third Sunday of Advent

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

"Rejoice Always"

The third Sunday of Advent is pervaded by the theme of joy. This Sunday is traditionally called "Laetare" Sunday, that is, the Sunday of "rejoicing," from the words of St. Paul in the second reading: "Rejoice in the Lord always; I say again, rejoice."

In the first reading we hear the words of the prophet Zephaniah: "Rejoice, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!" In the responsorial psalm this extraordinary vocabulary of joy is enriched with still other terms: "My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my salvation. With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation. Shout with exultation, O city of Zion."

Let us remain for a while with this word. (The Gospel passage continues the message of John the Baptist that we commented on last Sunday.) In the poem "Il sabato del villaggio" ("The village sabbath") Giacomo Leopardi has expressed the idea that in the present life the only authentic and possible joy is the joy of expectation, the joy of the sabbath. It is a "day full of hope and joy," full of joy precisely because it is full of hope. The expectation of the feast is better than the feast itself.

The possession of the good that was longed for brings nothing but disillusionment and boredom, because every finite good reveals itself to be inferior to what was desired and is tiresome; only expectation is the bearer of living joy. But this is precisely what Christian joy is in this world: the joy of the sabbath, the prelude to the Sunday without end, which is eternal life. St. Paul says that Christians must be "joyful in hope" (Romans 12:12), which does not mean that we must "hope to be happy" (after death), but that we must be "joyful in hope," already happy now by the simple fact of hoping.

The Apostle does not limit himself only to the command to rejoice; he also indicates how a community that wants to bear witness to joy and make it credible to others must conduct itself. He says: "Your affability should be known by all men."

The Greek word that we translate as "affability" signifies a whole complex of attitudes that runs from clemency to the capacity to know how to believe and to show oneself to be lovable, tolerant, and hospitable. We could translate it with the word "kindness." It is necessary that we first of all rediscover the human value

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of this virtue. Kindness is a virtue which is at risk, or, more exactly, it is a virtue that is extinct in the society in which we live.

Gratuitous violence in films and on television, language that is intentionally vulgar, the competition to go beyond the limits in regard to brutality and explicit sex is making us used to every expression of ugliness and vulgarity.

Kindness is a balm in human relationships. Family life would be so much better if there were more kindness in our gestures, in our words, and above all, in the sentiments of our hearts. Nothing extinguishes the joy of being together more than a certain vileness in our behavior. "A kind answer," says Scripture, "calms wrath, but a barbed one brings ire" (Proverbs 15:14). "A kind mouth multiplies friends, and gracious lips prompt friendly greetings" (Sirach 6:5). A kind person generates fond feelings and admiration wherever he goes.

Alongside this human value we must also rediscover the Gospel value of kindness. In the Bible the terms "meek" and "mild" do not have the passive sense of "subjected," "repressed," but the active sense of a person who acts with respect, courtesy, clemency toward others.

Kindness is indispensable above all for those who want to help others find Christ. The Apostle Peter recommends to the first Christians to be "ready to give a reason for their hope," but adds immediately: "But this must be done with sweetness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15 ff), which is to say, with kindness.

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