



HOMILY OF THE MOST REV. DONALD BOLEN, ARCHBISHOP OF REGINA

**Third Sunday of Advent
December 12, 2021**

Today's Readings:

1st Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18A;

2nd Reading: Philippians 4:4-7;

Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

Today, December 12th, is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Here in Canada, since 2002 at the initiative of the bishops' advisory group the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council, the Catholic Church in Canada chooses this feast to celebrate a National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patron of the Americas, appeared in Mexico in 1531 as an Indigenous woman to Juan Diego, whose Indigenous name was Cuauhtlatoatzin ("Eagle Who Speaks"), and spoke to him in his Indigenous language of Nahuatl. Around her waist she is wearing an Aztec maternity sash that Mexican women would wear to indicate they were with child. At a time when colonizing powers in the Americas were showing little respect for Indigenous ways, language and culture, the mother of Jesus comes as an Indigenous woman to this land, affirming her special love, indeed her identification with and embrace of Indigenous Peoples and culture. God walks with Indigenous Peoples, has always walked with Indigenous Peoples.

In today's Gospel, chosen not for the feast but for the 3rd Sunday of Advent, we hear echoes of a dialogue between John the Baptist and those he has baptized in the wilderness. In his own words, John's was a baptism of repentance, signalling a decision to change, to a new way of living, hence they ask him what they should be doing, "what should we do now?" John's response begins by asking them to "bear fruits worthy of repentance." He points them to generosity and concern with others; "whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." He points them to honesty, to just dealings with others, and to integrity.

Today, as many people are gaining a new understanding of the history of this land, including the history of what Indigenous Peoples have suffered, and of systemic injustice that lives on to this day, many are asking that question: what to do. What should we then do? Arising out of conversation with Indigenous people, here are a few possibilities:

- learn about the history of this land. Most of us know too little, and what we think we know is what was told to us through a particular lens. It is time we start looking at that history from an Indigenous perspective;
- be alert to the ways in which racist attitudes are embedded in our culture, our communities, and our way of seeing things, and pray for the grace to listen to Indigenous people, and to their past and present experience, with an open heart;
- learn more about Indigenous culture and ways; there is a richness there that can help us become more human, more in touch with creation and better able to live well in a sustainable way on this land; and when invited, accept invitations to learn more about Indigenous spiritual traditions and sacred ways;
- get to know the TRC's Calls to Action addressed to the churches, and its principles of reconciliation, and discern what you might do to engage with those;
- learn more about where systemic change is needed in our society, in terms of education, access to health and to clean water, in restorative justice, in constructive response to those experiencing trauma and intergenerational trauma, in treaty rights and responsibilities, and in addressing the needs of Indigenous youth. Be an ally in the pursuit of justice and right relations;
- respond generously when the Church gives us the opportunity to make a financial contribution to healing and reconciliation in Indigenous-led ways;
- ponder and enter into conversation, wherever possible with Indigenous people, about what the Church and Indigenous Peoples walking together in a good way would look like; heed the words from Indigenous people, "nothing about us without us"; learn to walk not in front, not behind, but together.

The third Sunday of Advent is also known as Gaudete Sunday – ‘gaudete,’ that is, rejoice. We hear St. Paul in today's reading from the letter to the Philippians tells us “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice.” There is a word of encouragement here, that can help us from feeling overwhelmed, from get depressed when faced with enormous challenges. Paul assures us, the Lord is near. When you are in a tough place, or when you are being profoundly challenged, it is not easy to rejoice. But let us take heart in what God is doing in our midst; let us be encouraged at the attention long overdue that is being given to Indigenous people, their gifts, the challenges they face; and let us pray for those preparing to leave for Rome and a meeting with Pope Francis, that good and helpful things can flow from this visit, that a new depth of relationship is coming to birth.