

Advent III (December 11, 2011)

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.*

For years many people have wondered if the QEII Library on the St. John's, Newfoundland campus of Memorial University was built backwards. Even members of the crew who constructed it have wondered. Most buildings in St. John's, as well as in other northern climates, are built with glass portions facing south to take advantage of natural light, and yet the library was built with the vast majority of its windows facing north. Apparently there is a reason for this, but it has made people wonder for years.

In the same vein, if you were to install solar panels facing the ground, I bet people would be left wondering.

If you were to sunbathe in a snowsuit, again I bet people would be left wondering. The sun is always shining, but unless we orient ourselves towards the light we will hardly benefit from it. In these dark and dreary days of late fall and winter, we know the negative effects of having less sunshine in our lives and the ill effects it can have on our moods; we know, therefore, by contrast, our desire for the light. In the same way, our impoverished, darkened souls thirst for the light of the Living God.

We are told that God is always present, yet unless we orient ourselves towards Him, we will not know His presence among us and within us. The fourteenth century hermit, Richard Rolle, in his book *The Fire of Love*, writes: "Be it known to all manner of people in this

wretched dwelling place of exile abiding, that no man may be imbued with love of endless life, nor be anointed with heavenly sweetness, unless he truly be turned to God.” Rolle is a man who has experienced first-hand the real warmth of the Love of God from within. “I cannot tell you how surprised I was the first time I felt my heart begin to warm,” says Rolle: “It was real warmth, too, not imaginary, and it felt as if it were actually on fire.” Rolle says that he writes these things not for the super-smart who want to amass more knowledge about God, but for ordinary Christians who wish to simply know and experience the real presence of God’s love within their hearts.

“When the Divine Lover enters the human heart, all yearnings are fulfilled!” So begins the psalm sung this

morning. The Prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, speaks of the Spirit of the Lord God being upon Him, “anointed with heavenly sweetness” in the words of Rolle, which causes him to proclaim a message of joy and hope—the Lord, by His very presence and power, reforms and refines, correcting all things by the light of His Spirit, and causing goodness to flourish in the heart and in the world. St. Paul, in the Epistle, instructs us not to “quench the Spirit.” Paul prays that the “God of peace himself [will] sanctify [us] entirely.” The Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of the faithful, desires to set us mere mortal vessels apart from unenlightened and lifeless creation, pouring the refining fire of His presence into our hearts—so that we may, indeed, have hearts to “Rejoice always.”

All this sounds good and wonderful, of course, but we must keep in mind that although the Lord is at hand we may be unwilling to receive Him—like windows facing the wrong way. In the Gospel, John proclaims the presence of Jesus in the midst of the religious elite: “Among you stands one whom you do not know,” John proclaims, and so John’s message is one of repentance—a repositioning of the soul to be able to know and receive the presence of God’s Kingdom which is among us. If, however, we insist on being stubborn and prideful, selfish and hard-of-heart, we fail to open our hearts to the ever-present Presence of God, and we will remain in darkness. In my ministry, I have had the privilege of seeing people open their hearts to God and be changed by the fire of His love. I have also seen

people persist in keeping their hearts closed to God’s presence and transformation, and remain in darkness. If you wish spiritual guidance in this matter, I invite you to see me—this is why I am here. One heart at a time we, as a parish family, can have hearts afire with God’s loving presence—and we can change the world—our world, and the world of others. “For gladness will radiate out for all to see,” sings the psalmist, “so great is your Presence among us.” Yes, indeed, so great is God’s Presence among us. Let us rejoice in it!