

Homily of Third Sunday of Advent Year B, 2023

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11; Luke 1:46-54; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

The Third Sunday of Advent is called 'Gaudate' Sunday, meaning Sunday of Joy. 'Gaudate' is a Latin word that means rejoice. The entrance antiphon of today's Mass, taken from Philippians 4:4-5, invites us, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." The second reading repeats the same invitation, "Rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Advent season used to be a penitential season (like Lenten season) with lots of austere practices such as fasting and prayer. The third Sunday used to be observed as a day of repose from the austere practices.

Today, we light the pink candle, which symbolizes joy. On this third Sunday, the Church raises the tempo of the Advent journey to inviting us to enter into a joyful expectation of the coming of Christ. Our celebration is our prayer for restoration of joy in the lives of men and women, especially people who have little or no joy in their lives: broken hearts, broken homes, broken communities, broken countries, and broken world. There are people, according to Pope Francis, whose life seems like "Lent without Easter." We pray that such people may receive that joy of the Lord which, according to Pope Francis, enables wheat to grow amongst weeds and the light of the Holy Spirit to radiate amid darkness.

We pray for the conversion of evil-minded people who derive pleasure in stifling other people's joy by inflicting pain on them. Unfortunately, such sadists are everywhere. We pray for the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, the coming of "the day of vindication by our God." That day, there will be glad tidings to the poor, broken hearts will be healed, liberty will be proclaimed to captives, and prisoners will gain freedom. May God protect his children. Amen.

John the Baptist was a son of a priest, Zechariah. Perhaps, the expectation was that John would become a priest like his father. Instead, he went off into the desert and lived an extreme austere life. "John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4). The Jews did not understand John's mission. They asked him to explain himself. John explained, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord." John announced to them that he was only a messenger of the Messiah, a voice of the Word.

Can I, like John, boldly claim to be a messenger of the Messiah in the 'desert' of people's lives by what I do and what I say? Can I be a voice for the voiceless? Can I be an instrument of glad tidings to others? Can I be an instrument of liberation and healing to others? Can I be an instrument of freedom and God's favor to others?

John belonged to a priestly family. But he abandoned his family and a stable priestly life and his inheritance to live a life of sacrifice in order to be a messenger of the Messiah.

Can I step out of my comfort zone by denying myself the things that give me comfort and step into some kind of desert for the wellbeing of those in need? Is there something I can do to bring joy to someone, or to a family or two, or to a place, or to a neighborhood, or to a people this Christmas?

A true and inner joy in the Holy Spirit is a gift we can have amid the ebbs and flows of situations within us and around us. We can still have a true and inner joy in the Holy Spirit in the deserts of our lives. This joy does not come from or depend on what we have. It does not come from food and drink. It comes from and depends on who we are (Romans 14:17). Jesus prays for us that our grief will become joy and our hearts will rejoice, and no one will take our joy away from us (John 16:20, 22). He promises us that we shall have fullness of joy amid the ebbs and flows of situations and in our deserts (John 15:11).

There are things we can do to receive inner joy and stop anxieties of life, afflictions, the world, the Evil One, and his agents from stealing it from us.

Some of the things are:

- Seek God. Trust him. Take refuge in him. Keep his precepts.
- Be guided by goodwill (purity of heart) in all you do and in all you say.
- Be yourself. Be self-content. Be self-controlled. Stay on your track. Focus on your goal.
- Be patient with yourself (your weaknesses) and with others (their weaknesses).
- Be self-confident. Have healthy self-esteem.
- Be positive thinking. Be optimistic. Be cheerful. Be a joy-giver.
- Be humble. Be respectful. Be peaceful. Be loving. Be law abiding.
- Be receptive and flexible in a positive way.
- Associate with God fearing, wise, and life-giving people.
- Let go of anger. Let go of grudges. Let go of guilt. Let go of hate. Let go of ugly past.
- Hold firm to the truth at all times.
- Put in your best at all times.

So, help us God. Amen.

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