Homily 3rd Sunday of Advent Year A

Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudate Sunday, meaning Sunday of joy. Gaudate is a Latin word that means "rejoice." The word rejoice is taken from Philippians 4:4-5, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I said rejoice;" the entrance antiphon of today's Mass. In the first week of Advent we prayed for the restoration of hope. In the second week we prayed for the restoration of peace. In this third week we are praying for the restoration of joy, especially for those, according to Pope Francis, whose life seem like "Lent without Easter." This type of joy, according to the pope, enables "wheat to grow in the midst of weeds" and the light of the Holy Spirit to radiate in the midst of darkness. Today we light the pink candle which symbolizes joy. There are people who have little or no joy in their life. We pray for such people today as we light the candle of joy. May God restore their joy again. Amen.

The first reading brings out clearly the theme of today's celebration. The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice. When there is no joy, life is like desert; life is like parched land; life is like steppe (barren land). Life without joy is like eyes that are blind, ears that are deaf and legs that are lame.

The joy we are talking about is not "feeling good" because of possession of worldly things. One can lack material things and still filled with joy. One may be encountering certain deprivations of life yet filled with joy. One can be physically sick but filled with joy. One can be physically challenged but filled with joy and even more joyful that those physically whole. One can have all worldly possessions but has no joy. What therefore is this joy? It is what Nehemiah the prophet calls the joy of the Lord which is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). It is joy from above. This joy is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing God and surrendering to him, knowing Jesus and trusting and abiding in him, and being guided by the inspiration and promptings of the Holy Spirit. This implies that the individual is spiritually alive and sound. Despite all afflictions of life and against all odds, the individual remains steadfast, endures and unshakable in his or her faith.

John the Baptist was in prison. The expectation was that Jesus would get him out of the prison. That did not happen. John also thought that Jesus was to deliver Israel from the Romans. That did not happen. John was disappointed and send messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one to come, or are we to wait for another." John the Baptist in his difficulties forgot that his being in physical prison does not mean spiritual prison. He forgot that Jesus was not a political messiah. Like John the Baptist, in our difficulties we doubt, we are disappointed, we look for answers. Jesus tells us in the Gospel not to doubt but to trust God and abide in him. Jesus says, I am the one who make the blind regain their sight. I make the lame walk again. I heal the lepers, I make the deaf hear. I raise the dead. I bring good tidings to the poor. He adds, "Blessed is the one who takes no offence at me." Another translation says, "Blessed is the one who does not lose faith in me." The second reading says, you must be patient, make your hearts firm, do not complain.

In John 16:22 Jesus tells his disciples, "So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." Believe Jesus when he says, "I will see you again." What is it that has taken your joy from you, write it down in a piece of paper and drop it in the intention box and say to Jesus: this is it: Jesus see my blindness, see my lameness, see my leprosy, see my deafness, see my death, see my bad news, see my prison. Strengthen my hands that are feeble, my knees that are weak and my heart that is frightened. Restore your joy again in my life, in my family, in my marriage, in my work place, in my engagement, in my future. May your joy be my strength. Amen.

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