

Homily of Third Sunday of Advent Year B, 2020

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 which means rejoice. Advent season was traditionally a penitential 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, to rejoice about the child Jesus soon to be born. The word *Gaudate* is the first word of the Latin translation of the entrance antiphon of today's Mass, taken from Philippians 4:4-5, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (*Gaudete in Domino semper*).

The first part of the first reading was the Isaiah prophecy concerning the mission of the Messiah. Jesus used this prophecy to introduce himself at the very beginning of his ministry in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." This proclamation summarizes our prayers: That many may receive glad tidings; that many may receive liberation and healing from afflictions and sicknesses; that the oppressed may gain freedom; and that God's favor be announced to many. Amen.

John the Baptist was a son of a priest, Zechariah. Probably, the expectation was that John would become a priest like his father. Instead, he disappeared from home and went into the desert and lived an extreme austere life, "He clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). And from the desert he "went throughout the whole region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," and preaching about the one who is coming after him (Luke 3:2-3). The Jews did not understand John's mission. They sent the priests and the Levites to John, the son of their fellow priest, to demand an explanation for his action. In today's Gospel, is the dialogue between John and the priests and the Levites. John explained to them, "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.

Can I, like John, claim, boldly, to be a messenger of the Messiah by what I do and what I say? 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 style of life and whatever he would have inherited from his father, Zechariah, to live a life of sacrifice in order to be a messenger of the Messiah. Can I leave my comfort zone; can I inconvenience myself for the wellbeing of those in need?

The pink candle we lit today is called "Candle of Joy." Our lighting the candle is our prayer that God may replace our sadness with joy. The second part of the first reading is a song of joy. The Psalm is the Blessed Virgin Mary's song of joy. And Paul urges us in the second reading, "Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks." This is a type of joy that springs from being close to God, and believing in God even in the most difficult circumstance. Prophet Nehemiah says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). This is the inner joy that helps us to navigate through the storms of the journeys of life, especially nowadays. We pray that God restores the joy of the Lord to many who do not have it and who desire it. Amen.

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