

## Homily of Third Sunday of Advent Year A, 2022

Isaiah 51:1-6a, 10; Psalm 146:6-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

The Third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudate* Sunday, meaning, Sunday of Joy. *Gaudate* is a Latin word which 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." In the first week of Advent, we prayed for restoration of hope. In the second week we prayed for restoration of peace. In this third week, we are praying for restoration of joy, especially for those, according to Pope Francis, whose life seem like "Lent without Easter." This type of joy, according to Pope Francis, enables wheat to grow amongst weeds and the light of the Holy Spirit to radiate amid 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 that they may experience the joy of the Lord; and may the joy of the Lord be their strength.

The first reading brings out clearly the theme of today's celebration. "The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers and rejoice with joyful song" (Isaiah 35:1-2). When there is no joy, life is like a desert or a parched land.

The joy we are reflecting on and praying for, is not given by worldly possessions and pleasures. One can lack worldly possessions but still be filled with joy. One may be encountering deprivations of life and yet be filled with joy. One can have all worldly possessions but has no joy. There are people who are rich in worldly possessions but are sad and unhappy. There are some suicide cases; externally, the individuals who took their life did not lack worldly possessions, but internally, lacked the joy that could have kept them alive.

At an airport, I had just gone through the airport security, and heading to the gate for my flight when an airport staff approached me. I saw tears in her eyes and she said that she was on duty, noticed that I was a priest, wanted to talk with me, and wanted me to pray for her. She said she had everything she needed in life but she was not a happy person; and that she did not know what to do. I asked her whether she had talked to her parish priest about what she was going through. She replied that she did not go to church. I told her that since she was at work, and I was heading for my flight, we would not be able to talk much. I told her that if she brought God in her life, she would see a change. I encouraged her to begin a relationship with God; and I promised to be praying for her. I gave her three Scripture quotations: "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10); "To be near God is my happiness" (Psalm 73:28); and "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). These three quotations may equally be helpful to us.

What, therefore, is this joy? It is the gladness and satisfaction which we experience when we are close to Jesus, when we surrender to him, trust in him, be guided by his words and precepts, and by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This joy is not given by worldly possessions.

John the Baptist was in prison while Jesus was going about preaching and doing good. Jesus did not call upon Herod to release John. Maybe John was disappointed. Maybe John was, also, disappointed that the baptism of fire and Holy Spirit, and the severe judgement of the "brood of vipers" were not happening. In his disappointment he sent messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one to come, or are we to wait for another."

Many times, we are like John the Baptist. We feel disappointed that in our desert, parched land, feebleness, weakness, fear, blindness, lameness, deafness, dumbness, and imprisonment, our prayers are not answered. Today, Jesus encourages us, "Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me" (Matthew 11:6). Another translation says, "Blessed is the one who does not lose faith in me." St. James tells us in the second reading, "You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). Isaiah encourages us in the first reading, "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, ... Be strong, do not fear!" (Isaiah 35:3-4).

For those who do not take offense and lose faith, God's words will come to fulfilment: "Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then, the eyes of the blind shall see, and the ears of the deaf be opened, then, the lame shall leap like a stag, and the mute tongue sing for joy" (Isaiah 35:4-6). Jesus invites us to bring all our spiritual and physical afflictions to him. He assures us in today's gospel, "... the blind [will] regain their sight, the lame [will] walk, lepers [will be] cleansed, the deaf [will] hear, the dead [will be] raised, and the poor [will] have the good news proclaimed to them" (Matthew 11:5-6).

Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). May it be so for you, and for me. Amen.

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