

Homily of Third 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 entrance antiphon of today's Mass taken from Philippians 4:4-5, invites us to, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." 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, as we light the candle of joy, that they may experience the joy of the Lord.

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." When there is no joy, life becomes like a desert, or a parched land, or a steppe (barren land).

Joy is different from the temporary pleasure as a result of worldly possessions. 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 be physically sick or be physically challenged but be filled with joy, and even more joyful than those physically whole. One can have all worldly possessions but has no joy.

What therefore is this joy? This joy is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing Jesus Christ, being close to him, surrendering to him, trusting in him, be guided by his words and precepts, and by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is the joy of the Lord that is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). The psalmist says it all where he says, "To be near God is my happiness" (Psalm 73:28).

John the Baptist was in prison. The expectation was that Jesus would get him out of the prison. That did not happen. Probably, John was also disappointed that he had not witnessed the baptism of fire he had prophesied that Jesus was to give to his followers. In his disappointment he sent messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one to come, or are we to wait for another." Like John the Baptist, when we are besieged by challenges of life, we become disappointed, we ask many questions, we look for answers. Jesus tells us in the Gospel not to doubt but have faith. Jesus says, I am the one who make the blind regain their sight. I make the lame walk again. I make the lepers clean. 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 offense at me." Another translation says, "Blessed is the one who does not lose faith in me." The second reading encourages us to be patient, to make our hearts firm, and not to complain. This means that we are not to despair.

What is it that has taken our joy from us? What is our blindness? What is our lameness? What is our leprosy? What is your deafness? What is our death? What is our bad news? What is our imprisonment? What is our disappointment? What is our desert, our parched land, and our steppe? Jesus invites us to bring all our spiritual and physical afflictions to him. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30). When we accept this invitation, and receive the promised rest, his joy will be in us, and our joy become complete (John 15:11). Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP