

Homily – Lk. 3: 10-18  
Third Sunday of Advent - 11<sup>th</sup> December 2021

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Joseph Haydn, an Austrian composer of the classical period was once asked why his Church Music was so cheerful and he replied: “When I think upon my God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap from my pen; and since God has given me a cheerful heart, I can do no other than serve Him with a cheerful spirit”.

We are on the third Sunday of Advent called the *Gaudete* Sunday, and on this Sunday the Church invites us to “Rejoice”, because, the Lord’s coming is near. The word *Gaudete* in Latin, meaning ‘rejoice’, comes from the entrance antiphon to this Sunday’s Mass: “*Gaudete in Domino semper*”, “Rejoice in the Lord always”. And the common theme of the day’s Scripture readings is one of joy and encouragement.

Well! Advent is a time for joy, not only because we are anticipating the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, but also because God is already in our midst. Christian joy does not come from the absence of sorrow, pain or trouble, but from an awareness of the presence of Christ within us.

In the Gospel of today, John the Baptist explains the secret of Christian joy as a wholehearted commitment to God's ways lived out by doing His will. According to the Baptizer, happiness comes from doing our duties faithfully, doing good for others and sharing our blessings with those in need. Filled with joyful expectation that the Messiah was near, the people ask John, "What should we do?" He tells them to act with justice, charity and honesty, letting their lives reflect their transformation. And for us, that transformation occurs when Christ enters our lives, and it is to be reflected in our living in the ways that John suggested. In other words, John reminds us; 'that membership in the Church, knowing the teachings of the Church and the Bible, being baptized and going to Mass on Sundays are not enough'. We must care for others and share our blessings with others.

An Old Russian story tells of a farmer named Diametric who wishes to see God face to face before he dies. He prays to Saint Nikolai who promises to grant him his wish. The saint goes on to specify the place and the day of the encounter. As the time for encounter draws near, Diametric sets out on his long journey. He has only one thing in mind: his appointment with God. But along the road, he meets an old farmer whose cart has broken down. Now he has a dilemma: should he stop to help

the farmer or hurry on to his appointment with God? His kind heart wins, and he stays to fix the farmer's cart. It takes him hours to finish the task and he never makes it to the meeting place. That night, Saint Nikolai appears to him in a dream and says: "My friend, you have already encountered the Lord. It happened when you helped that unknown man in need."

Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev, a Russian political and a Christian religious philosopher who died in 1948 has a very thought-provoking quote to offer on this reflection. He would say: "If I am hungry, that is a material problem; if someone else is hungry, that is a spiritual problem".

Well! The question people ask John is about action: what should we do? John's answer is very concrete and action-oriented. The social revolution he speaks of, is in fact a conversion of the heart; it points to something much deeper: that is to love your neighbor as yourself. And, when we put ourselves before the Lord, and say: "What should we do?", we need to be prepared for an answer. In the depths of our hearts, the Lord speaks to us and tells us what we ought to be doing. But however, sometimes we don't want to hear it. Because it could be a challenge given to us: a challenge to change, or repent

from our comfortable way of doing things or living lives.

What Jesus probably tells us today is this: Take yourself who you are, but live in such a way that you care for the other, that you treat the other with justice and dignity. And, the powerful preaching of John the Baptist assures us, ‘that when we feel powerless over something that is happening in our life or in our world’, God does not abandon us, and God knows us well and God is with us.

I don’t know if it strikes: For every 10 Euros we spend during this season on different things, if we could give or keep aside at least one euro for those in need, it might change our lives and also it might change the lives of people who are struggling during this Christmas season. Dr. Anthony Padovano who holds doctorates and professorships in theology and literature once said: “No one can claim to be a follower of Christ and remain entirely unlike the Master whom he professes to love”.

Well! Through her ministry in Jesus’ name, Mother Teresa brought untold blessings and joy to the poor who lay unattended and forgotten on the streets of Calcutta. She brought hope to those who had lost all hopes in life. When asked the source of her joy, Mother Teresa would reply: “Joy is prayer, strength, love - a net of love by which you can catch souls. A joyful heart is the normal

result of a heart burning with love”. And she would add: Smile at each other, smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other - it doesn't matter who it is - and that will help you grow up in greater love for each other.” Yes! When Advent arrived every year, Mother Teresa’s life, continued to witness the joy which is the hallmark of every Christian. Joy is the true gift of Christmas, and we can communicate this joy simply: ‘with a smile, with a kind gesture, with a little help, with a compassionate look or with an act of forgiveness or generosity’.

When someone once cynically asked Mother Teresa how she was going to feed thousands of hungry people, she answered with disarming simplicity: **“One by one”**. Well! We may not be able to make a dent in the many complex problems of our society. But we could ask ourselves whether we can make a difference in the fortunes of at least one needy person.

Dear brothers and sisters let us be messengers of hope and joy to those around us especially the needy. Let this season inspire us to be generous as God was and God is. If we could give our time, talents and resources, and go the extra mile, we might be building someone’s future. God bless you all, **Amen.**

