

## Homily Gaudete Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent 2021

Gaudium in Latin means JOY, so it started me thinking about joy in my life. My Mum and Dad brought me joy as I grew up. My three sisters brought me joy in a happy household. I loved school and my teachers and friends filled me with joy. Sport, and playing football till I was 57 (Broke my nose in my last game) in particular has brought me great joy. My days in seminary were full of joy and the many friends I have made in life's journey have brought me immense joy and some friendships have lasted over 60 years. However, the day of my greatest joy was the day Alice and I got married in July 1984 and equally joyful were the births of my two boys John and James in July 1985 and 1988 respectively.

Gaudete Sunday Readings, the third Sunday in Advent, begin with the proclamation of the Prophet Zephaniah: 'Shout for joy O Daughter of Jerusalem. Rejoice, exult with all your heart. The Lord, The King of Israel is in your midst. You have nothing more to fear. He will exult with joy over you. He will renew you by His love. He will dance with shouts of joy over you on the day of the great festival.' Zephaniah was a Prophet in Jerusalem and lived in the reign of King Josiah between 639-609 BC. Though his prophecies focussed on The Day of Judgement Israel would face Zephaniah also proclaimed a day when all their pain and sin would be eclipsed by the presence of God in our midst - The Messiah.

Today's Second Reading from St Paul to The Philippians continues with the theme of joy of God in our midst and preaches to the people of Philippi: 'I want you to be happy and full of joy because The Lord is near. Do not be afraid and ask the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving for all you need. This message of joy all the more impressive as St Paul probably wrote it whilst he was in prison in Rome around 61-63 AD.

In today's Gospel St Luke proclaims the Baptist's message which states: 'I baptise you with waters but the one who comes after me who will baptise you with The Holy Spirit and I am unfit to untie the straps of his sandals. I must decrease and He must increase.' St Luke writing for The Early Church in Antioch, the second centre of Christianity after Jerusalem, is clearly telling his community that it is Jesus and not John who is the promised Messiah as there were factions amongst them who believed the opposite. However, the truth is clear that John is proclaiming that God in Christ is in our midst and this is the cause of great joy.

We note in all 3 readings that God's JOY is proclaimed, at the time of Zephaniah, in the midst of national turbulence, imprisonment in the case of St Paul and division in Luke's Antioch. It appears then that Christian joy will therefore, not spare us the challenges of life but instead offers us hope, in the midst of life's difficulties. It is the hope that a newly born King will bring peace on Earth. Mary was joyful when it was announced that she would be the Mother of God but her unmarried status also brought her judgement. Jesus' Presentation in the Temple brought Mary and Joseph great cause for joy but Mary was also reminded that 'a sword will pierce your heart'. At Cana Jesus' presence at the wedding brought Mary immense joy but she was reminded also of Jesus' mission which would eventually bring her great suffering.

So as we thank God for his many joyful blessings: marriage, children, family, friends, our ministries and successes in our life which fill us with peace let us not forget that this deep joy can so often be experienced in the midst of life's difficulties and even suffering. We, like St Julian of Norwich, if we are to be true to the Good News of great joy that God is present even in the midst of such challenges must believe 'All will be well, all manner of things will be well' This is indeed our faith and cause of great JOY.

Praise be Jesus Christ