

Homily 3rd Sunday in Advent 2023 Gaudete Sunday

Have you ever been to what should have been a joyful occasion which turned into anything but? In my twenties I went to the wedding of a close friend. In Scotland, it was what they call 'a mixed marriage', where the groom was a Catholic and the bride was a Protestant. There are still tensions to this day in Scotland regarding the 'religious divide'. These unfortunately, now and again raise their 'ugly head'. The Nuptial Mass went beautifully but, during the speeches at the reception, the bride's father took exception to something the best man said and got up and 'went for him', ending up in a brawl to the dismay of the bride and groom. The moral of the story is that not all expected to be joyful occasions go to plan!

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the JOY of the age of The Messiah:
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up hearts that are broken;
to proclaim liberty to captives,
freedom to those in prison;
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.
'I exult for JOY in the Lord,
my soul rejoices in my God.....

However, when Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, claims to fulfil this same prophecy the joy of the dawn of the Messianic Age is overshadowed by the anger of the synagogue officials, who call him a 'blasphemer' and attempt to throw him off a nearby cliff.

In The Responsorial Psalm Our Blessed Mother's JOY is clear for all to see:

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit REJOICES in God, my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her nothingness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!

This JOY however, is also tinged with fear, as the young maiden is asked to be the Mother of Our Saviour. Later, at Jesus' Presentation in The Temple Mary according to St Luke's Gospel, on hearing the words of The Prophet Simeon, 'A sword will pierce your heart' Mary 'pondered all these things in her heart'

In The Gospel today John the Baptist humbly proclaims the arrival of The Messiah in the person of Jesus, He JOYFULLY heralds the presence of The Christ among the people, 'one of whom I am unfit to undo his sandal straps'. Yet not long after this, John is beheaded, a whim of Herodias' daughter. Three years later Jesus himself is crucified by The Romans on the demand of The Chief Priests and The Jewish Religious Leaders.

Yes, Gaudete Sunday IS a day of great JOY but as T S Elliot, in his poem "The Journey of The Magi", reminds us, the **birth of Jesus** cannot be separated or even fully understood in isolation from **his passion, death and Resurrection**:

And three trees on the low sky, And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow...Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver.....

This set down this: were we led all that way **for Birth or Death?** There was a Birth, certainly, We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen **birth and death**.....

The third royal gift of myrrh to The Servant baby King, administered on death, is a timely reminder of this reality. So do JOYFULLY celebrate the Coming of The Messiah but, as disciples of Jesus, let us be mindful this Advent of the whole Salvation Story.