

Homily of Third Sunday of Advent, Year A, 2025

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 reflected on Christ our hope. In the second week we reflected on Christ our peace. In this third week, we light the pink candle which symbolizes joy. We pray for restoration of joy to those who have little or no joy in their lives; especially for those, as Pope Francis puts it, whose lives seem like "Lent without Easter." Pope Francis encourages us to pray for the joy which enables wheat to grow amongst weeds and the light of the Holy Spirit to radiate amid darkness. May the joy of the Lord be our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

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). Life is like a desert or a parched land where there is no joy.

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 lack joy. We can see that the world is more developed now than in the past but less happy now than in the past. Someone says, "It's look like the more money we come across, the more problems we see."

What is this joy? It is the gladness that comes from interior contentment and serenity which we experience when we are close to God, when we surrender to him, when we trust in him, when we are guided by his words and precepts, and when we are directed by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This joy is divinely given. Therefore, we need to be close to the Giver in order to receive it! The psalmist says, "To be near God is my happiness" (Psalm 73:28). Void and sadness overshadow where the joy of the Lord is lacking. Such a state leads to destructive attitudes.

While John the Baptist was in prison, Jesus did not challenge Herod to release John. Most likely, John was disappointed and doubted that if Jesus was the savior, he could have rescued him from prison. Maybe, John was disappointed that he had not seen Jesus' baptism of fire and Holy Spirit on the people which he prophesied. Maybe, John was disappointed that the severe judgement of the "brood of vipers" was not happening, rather, Jesus attended banquets hosted by the "brood of vipers" and tax collectors. Maybe, John was disappointed when he compared himself, who lived in the desert, wore clothing made of camel's hair, ate locusts and wild honey, with Jesus' life style. Maybe, considering all these, John was disappointed and doubted that Jesus was the one he prophesied about that was coming after him that was mightier than himself whom he said he was not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. Therefore, in his disappointment and doubt John sent messengers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Does someone lack joy because he or she is in a situation of frustration, disappointment, and doubt due to difficult life issues which he or she has no grasp of and which are beyond his or her comprehension or control? Does someone lack joy because his or her plan failed or has not worked out yet? Does anyone lack joy as he or she wonders God's presence or absence in a painful situation? Let the person pray, as Pope Francis tells us, for the joy which enables wheat to grow amongst weeds and the light of the Holy Spirit to radiate amid darkness.

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).

May God's words, as Isaiah prophesies in the first reading, come to fulfilment for those who do not take offense and those who do not lose faith: "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 (a male deer), 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 that 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). The joy "... no one will take from you" (John 16:22). May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

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