

3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT, B  
REJOICE, PRAY AND GIVE THANKS

*“I am not the Christ ... I am a voice that cries in the wilderness” (Jn. 1: 20, 23)*

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.”*** This text is the Entrance Antiphon at Mass today. On this Third Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to *rejoice* because the coming of the Lord is near. Traditionally, this Sunday is *Gaudate* or *Laetaere* Sunday. Both words mean *Rejoice*. So, today we celebrate *Rejoice Sunday*. On this Third Sunday of Advent, the third candle, The Shepherd Candle, rose in colour, which symbolizes joy, is lit. At Mass, the priest may also wear a rose coloured chasuble, which also symbolizes joy. It reminds us of the joy of the Holy Family; the joy the world experienced at the Birth of the Saviour; the joy we have as we prepare for the celebration of Christmas; and it points to the eternal joy that we, His faithful, will share at His second coming. We can glean these themes of joy and rejoice from the Readings and the Responsorial Psalm.

***The context of the Book of Prophet Isaiah (Is. 61: 1-2, 10-11)*** we have listened to at this Mass could be likened to our present global pandemic situation when life is more uncertain, strange, life-altering and challenging. The Jews had just returned from a battered and humiliating experience of exile in Babylon. It was time for restructuring, rebuilding, resettlement and reintegration. It was a very difficult and challenging time. But in the midst of these unpleasant circumstances, the Word of God was ministered to the prophet Isaiah to encourage the people and give them hope and assurance in the coming of the Lord. He was sent to “bring good news to the poor, bind hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; and to proclaim a year of favour from God.” His message was a call to faith. No one rejoices in the midst of sorrow if he has nothing superior to look up to. We need that unflinching and inexplicable hope in God, who is able to do more than any man could ever imagine. We can relate with this message at a time like this when we stretch out of the windows in search of healing, breakthrough and normalcy in our world. The challenge is for us to remain faithful and focused in the midst of all these so that we can sift out the inherent reasons to be grateful and joyful.

***The theme of rejoicing is palpable in the Responsorial Psalm with the Magnificat.*** Mary’s song of joy, praise and thanksgiving to God, Who looked on His

servant in her nothingness; raising her to such height that “all generations will call her blessed.” This reveals the power of God, Who is able to turn around all our human conditions. St. Paul in the Second Reading (1 Thess. 5: 16-24) exhorts his early converts in Thessalonica to “Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God ...” For St. Paul, the Christian life should be characterised by these three fundamentals: continual joy, constant prayer and ceaseless thanksgiving. Our joy as Christians come from a good relationship with God built on trust. Therefore, there is no room for complaining, grumbling and whining. With God, there is always something to be grateful for.

***We encounter John the Baptist a second successive Sunday on our Advent journey.*** Why is John so important? Like the Jews, in the Gospel (Jn. 1: 6-8; 19-28), who sent priests and Levites to ask: “Who are you?”, we may want to ask the same question. It is necessary to know that behind the inquisitiveness of the Jews, was the curiosity to identify the Messiah. Every Jew of age and maturity was familiar with the Messianic prophecies. They were waiting and expecting. But their idea of the Messiah was hazy because of their misguided expectations of a political, social and economic Messiah, who would overthrow the Roman colonial masters and restore the Jews at the top of all civil, social and religious affairs. No wonder they have been waiting and are still waiting for the Messiah to this day. They were curiously fascinated by John the Baptist’s prophetic voice; his weird appearance; his austere diet and by his courageous ministry. These compelled them to send messengers to ask: “*Are you the Messiah, the Christ?*” “*Are you Elijah?*” “*Are you the prophet?*” These questions were all related to John the Baptist in some sense: in him, they saw Elijah, who was to come before the Messiah (Mal. 4: 5); and one of the prophets, Isaiah or Jeremiah, who was expected to precede the Messiah (Deut. 18: 15). Perhaps, the mistake here was that they were too focused on what they thought that they could not see the reality before them. Sometimes, our prejudices blind us from the truth. When we think we know too much, it shots us out from embracing anything new.

***John the Baptist’s answer was an affirmation more than a negation.*** He was affirming the fact that his identity: “I am a voice.” Yes, he was a voice, pointing to the King. He came to “prepare a people fit for the Lord” (Lk. 1: 17). The humility of John stares us at the face as he did not allow himself to be carried away by the positive impressions the people had of him. He knew who he was and was content with that. He knew he was a *witness, a witness for the light*. He made no claims and would not accept any to be imposed on him. John the Baptist was a man, conscious of his boundaries and focused on his mission. “I baptise you with water, but there

stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap” (Jn. 1: 27).

**Dear friends,** like John, we are called to be *the voice* that communicates the joy of the Birth of Christ in us to others; as a *witness*, we are given the privilege to share our faith, our hope and joy with others through works of charity and words of comfort. Let us remember that a true voice and an authentic witness must have a personal experience; must be convinced and passionate; must be ready to make sacrifices. Let us be focused and not be swept away by the euphoria of the celebration and the hustles of the season. May God grant us the needed grace to make our hearts befitting birthplace for our Lord and Saviour when He comes at Christmas so that the joy and peace He brings may last in our lives.