

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent 2023 Year B

Today is the 3rd Sunday of Advent and it is also called Gaudete Sunday because, from the Latin word for Joy, it is the theme that runs through the prayers and readings.

From the mood of threats and warnings of the past few weeks, Joy is now the Advent message, one of hope and encouragement, urging us to rejoice and be happy because the Lord is near.

We are reminded that Joy is basic to being a Christian and our vocation is to radiate Joy.

Well, if that is true, then we have lost the plot somewhere along the way, for all too often Christianity has been associated with sadness.

Many of us are more familiar with the Gospel message of carrying the Cross than of its abiding characteristic of Joy.

We tend to think of Jesus as the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Yet it is this same Jesus who prayed towards the end of His ministry “These things I have spoken to you that my Joy might be in you and your Joy be complete”.

In reality there was of course much hardship and suffering in the life of Jesus, but there was also a Joy that was compatible with pain.

All of our lives we spend a lot of time searching for happiness; it is our God given appetite, the purpose for which we were created.

But somehow that happiness seems to escape us as we go searching after it in the wrong places. Our big mistake is often to equate Joy with pleasure and to look for it in material things.

We can buy pleasure, but often it will cost us dearly, but all the money in the world cannot purchase happiness, for Christian Joy is something much deeper and richer than the smile or a laughter upon a happy face.

Christian Joy comes from an awareness that God is with us and produces a contentment and inner peace that cannot be taken from us.

Friendship with God is the source of Christian Joy, and no trial can ever drown that Joy, because it is born of faith and should be evident in the life of a believer.

On the first Christmas, when God came down in the person of Jesus, He filled the world with glad tidings of great Joy.

His whole life was focused towards the Father in Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. It is a human trait that we can get so caught up in our own daily problems that we fail to reflect the Joy of that marvellous truth "that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, and that whoever believes in Him might not die but have eternal life".

If that is true then what it teaches us is that there is no greater proof of love than to give of ourselves to others.

Our Christmas Joy cannot be complete unless we can find it in our hearts to show generosity to who have nothing to give us in return.

If we live our lives by values that do not even remotely resemble those of the Gospel then we cannot reflect the light of Christ to others.

Look around you. Experience shows that the happiest people are those doing the most for others; they have also discovered the surprising truth that in giving you really do receive.

God willing, one day we will hear those longed-for words "Well done good and faithful servant, enter now into the Joy of the Lord."