

Fr James' homily for The Third Sunday of Advent 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-11
Second Reading: First Letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians 5:16-24
Gospel: John 1:6-8; 19-28



“Don’t worry, be happy!”...is a very stupid sentiment and a very annoying song. How do you command any emotion. There is nothing more annoying than the person who says “Cheer up”, or “it can’t be that bad”. Nevertheless, today is known as “Gaudete” Sunday, taking the name from the first word in Latin of the Entrance Antiphon and meaning “Rejoice.” This is the central point in Advent and so a moment to look forward to the coming wonder of God’s love and faithfulness. “Gaudete” is the imperative; it is a command. And St Paul takes up the theme today commanding his new church to “Be happy at all times”.

The reason for this confident command is shown to us by the Prophet Isaiah, in very familiar words...ask yourself for a moment why these words are so familiar...”The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me...” Isaiah here is not so much speaking as the prophet for God, on God’s behalf, but as God. He is speaking not about himself but about another.

The reason these words are so familiar to us is that they are the words that Jesus quotes in that dramatic scene in the Gospels where he first preaches in the synagogue at the start of his ministry...and when he concludes them saying that “these words have been fulfilled in your hearing.” We rejoice today because this is who Jesus is - the one who brings good news and who can bind up broken hearts. Do you believe him? He is just bragging, or is he telling you the truth? Yes? So, be happy!

All of the words of Isaiah, and of Jesus, about freedom, about good news for the poor and so on remind us of the purpose of Christ’s incarnation, of God with us. That purpose is to share all of human experience and weakness and pain; to journey into the heart of it and bring it redemption. To end the loneliness and alienation caused by sin and wrap our nature into his own: the word salvation is much the same as the word salve (a lotion or healing ointment), and not by accident the Latin “Salve” meaning greetings, as in “Salve Regina”, “Hail, Holy Queen.”

Indeed, in these Advent days ask Mary our Mother to help you to understand these words of Isaiah, as she clearly knew them deeply and understood their meaning as Gabriel greeted her, because she quotes them in response: “My soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation...”

This is most certainly the news we need and is programmed into this holy season. Also, of course, programmed into Advent, and this centre part of Advent, is the voice and the person of the last and greatest of all the prophets of Israel, John the Baptist, as we see in the Gospel. So, when people ask you, as they asked John, “who are you?” you can answer more and more, and in any circumstances, that you are a servant of the Living God, shown to us in Jesus the anointed one, and resolve to live evermore a converted life, as St Paul says, so that you are more and more a “witness to speak for the light”. Be happy, for:

“God has called you and he will not fail you.” (Second reading.)

Alleluia, Come Lord Jesus!

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.