

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Advent (B)

17<sup>th</sup> December 2017

‘Cause of our Joy?’

Is 61: proclaim a year of favour from the Lord

*Magnificat*

1Th 5: never suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt

Jn 1: 6–8; 19–28: John the Baptist is asked, ‘Who are you?’

It’s *Gaudete* Sunday today — a Latin word that means, “Rejoice!” — and I think we’ve had the words ‘joy’ or ‘rejoice’ at least (9+)10 times already in this Mass. This 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, with its rose-pink candle and vestments, brings with it a strong sense of that Advent joy of anticipation. Christmas is coming! Certainly the other day there was much joy as the children at their carol service sang out with gusto the final line of the chorus, “O, come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!” There was a real joy of anticipation. What are we getting excited about? What’s the cause of this joy?

Some people seem to have lost the joy of childhood. They’d like to preach a message of doom and gloom at the end of this century, rather than a message of joy. We have had a war-torn century, of ethnic violence and of great famines; we do see crime and violence, drug addictions and new and wasting diseases. That age-old question comes to

haunt us: ‘How does a good God allow so much suffering in the world?’ But there’s an opposite of that question: ‘How come there’s so much good in the world?’ There are good things being done day by day by almost every living creature. We never hear of them, but in fact they are so many times greater than the evil things which we do hear about. God’s good world mustn’t be measured by the news coverage of murders and misery, divorces and deceit, oppression and perversion. The world’s joy does outweigh its pain, but we never seem to think of it that way. That’s because really we do think that being good and happy is usual and being bad or sad is unusual. And that’s because — whether we know it or not — in our heart of hearts we all really believe in basic goodness, which is God.

So, it’s right and normal and human to rejoice, even though there might be pain and loss in our life. The joy outweighs the sorrow; the devil is only a creature turned bad, not an omnipotent divinity like God. God’s got it under control: His plan works out for good, He has not slipped up and been caught out by the existence of evil! His

plan can cope with the mess we make. The Church tells us to rejoice today. It doesn't say: don't rejoice at Jesus's birth at Christmas because you can foresee His crucifixion on Good Friday!

A few summers ago I met a man in Lourdes called Leslie. He has multiple disabilities: a list of things wrong with him, many from birth, and he's had 30+ operations but he kept saying to me again and again: "I have a good life."<sup>1</sup> Leslie is a man able to enjoy a life which isn't comfortable, and isn't easy, and has had more than a fair share of difficulties, but he can say "I have a great life". He's still full of the joy of living, with and for others; with and for God. Like Leslie, John the Baptist gained his joy even from a hard life: he had a difficult message to preach, and people misunderstood him, and eventually he was even martyred. Nor was John the Baptist's 'career' ever going to fulfil him: his mission was going to peter out as Jesus took over from his ministry. John didn't revel in a short-lived fame that

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<sup>1</sup> I wondered why he reiterated this, and came to realise that society's promotion of abortion probably makes him feel threatened: the systematic elimination of the disabled before birth is like saying to him 'Of course you shouldn't really have been born'!

was not his own: he just kept pointing away from himself and saying, 'No, Christ is the One you want to follow. Forget about me.'

So, that's how to overcome life's disappointments. Look at Jesus who is coming, and say — there's the point of my life. Now I can face pain and sorrow and difficulties and illness and incapacity and career failures and bereavement, because I know they aren't going to last. What's going to last is the joy of living, because God the baby is going to be born in a stable at Bethlehem; God living our life and giving us His life. What more joy could we have than God the Son sharing life with us? Take this Advent Sunday to rejoice for all you're worth — because what you're worth is what God says you're worth. He says you're worth living for, and you're worth dying for — and He knows exactly what He's doing.

Let's take home the joy being offered to us this *Gaudete* Sunday; let's carry this joy through the next week or so, and make sure that we bring much deliberate Christian joy to others in the run-up to this Christmas.