

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

St. John 1:6-8, 19-28

We celebrate today the third Sunday of Advent—Gaudete Sunday. The word “gaudete” is a Latin word meaning “rejoice.” A day of rejoicing at the nearness of the coming of the Lord amidst the penance and preparation we make for the birth of the saviour and the coming again of Him. The readings of this Mass proclaim the joy of the coming of the Lord and that joy is reflected in the rose candle and these rose-coloured vestments. Wearing this festive colour amidst the violet of Advent signifies the great joy of the Church as she knows that Jesus Christ is soon to be amongst us.

Our prayers today do not merely look forward to the “Lord who is to come,” but worship and hail with joy “the Lord who is now nigh and close at hand.” The reading from Isaiah describes the joy to be found when the Lord arrives and the blessings with which we will be showered: those who are broken-hearted shall be healed, those enslaved and imprisoned to addiction and fear and sin shall be set free, those who mourn the death of all those that they love shall be comforted. Where there was drought there shall be new sprouts. All the penances we have made, all the injustice we have endured, all the pain we have felt, all the sacrifices we have made in the name of Christ will be transformed and we shall be seen by all the world as glorious and righteous. This will be ours if we have, as St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, prepared ourselves by seeking out the Holy Spirit in our life and in the lives of others, if we have listened and prayed the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, if we have stuck to what is good and avoided evil, and when we have failed, sought to heal the rupture we have caused in our relationship with God in the Sacrament of Penance, and if we have prayed for God’s blessing on all that we do and

prayed that our family and our friends and all that we meet may be blessed by God. This is embodied in the Gospel of St. John in the person of St. John the Baptist. In him is the spirit of Advent. This man, “a voice... crying out in the wilderness,” preparing himself and others for the coming of the Messiah in whom all the expectations of the Law and prophets will be fulfilled. That is why he is asked whether he is the Messiah, and if not, then is he the prophet Moses, the embodiment of the Law, or is he Elijah, the icon of the prophets. He is not these nor the Messiah for before the incarnation of God can be made known to all people, they must be prepared. It is the same today as we memorialise the incarnation of God and look forward to the coming again of Christ.

Just as quickly as this Advent passes by so too shall our lives and the chance we have now to prepare for the coming of Jesus. It is no good living our lives presuming that we shall be so blessed as to see God face to face, the way we presume upon Christmas by decorating offices, shops and houses and putting-up Christmas trees during what is supposed to be a time of preparation and penance. That is the reason for the Advent wreath. It reminds us that we approach Christmas steadily and patiently.

We need to prepare ourselves, heart and mind, body and soul, to know what it is we are remembering and to what we are looking forward. No one can look at the sun without preparing his eyes and no one can look for the coming of Christ without preparing their soul. For in Christ the majesty of God is revealed in a small child who would save the world.

And that is why we rejoice; that the staggering power of the divine so longs for intimacy with you and me that he became a man, like you and I, and lived amongst us.