

SERMON ADVENT 3A 2019.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice.

As I mentioned at the beginning of Mass, the theme of today, is rejoice, or to quote Isaiah in his reading today-rejoice and sing for joy! Rejoice and be happy at the nearness of the feast of the lords birth. Rejoice and be happy that we are to celebrate the great feast of god become man, rejoice and be happy at our salvation from sin and death, rejoice and be happy that Gods's promises to the prophets have been fulfilled in our lord and saviour Jesus Christ. I can't though pretend that I am rejoicing at wearing this pink vestment though, but it gives all of you a good laugh! It is nice to see though the third, pink candle lit on our advent wreath, reminding us that Xmas is now only 10 days away.

Today we have heard a slightly puzzling Gospel for this 3rd Sunday of advent. It is not strange to hear of John the Baptist, he is the great figure of Advent, the voice calling people on people to repent in preparation for the coming of the Christ. Yet we hear of him in prison near the end of his life, and seeming to doubt that Jesus is the chosen one, is he the one the scriptures speak off, is he really the one he pointed people to. It seems very strange to think John the Baptist doubting Jesus or questioning his faith in him, he was the greatest prophet, but perhaps in his situation of a dark cell, it would be natural to question and wonder-as no doubt we would. After all Jesus was living a very different kind of life and ministry, Jesus was in the very midst of society, he hadn't gone out to the desert, where people had had to go to find John. Perhaps John had heard rumours of Jesus meeting with great sinners-tax-collectors and prostitutes, perhaps he just naturally wondered what Jesus was doing.

The answer Jesus gave to the question John sent via his disciples would have wiped away any doubts, because Jesus simply quotes scripture-the prophet Isaiah, words that were very much associated with the saviour who was to come-words that we heard in the first reading,

"the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me."

Jesus doesn't criticise John for this questioning, for his seeming uncertainty and doubt, instead he applauds John, that he wasn't a reed swaying in the breeze, he was a strong voice for God who didn't waver, nor did he wear fine clothes, in other words he wasn't interested in society's approval or getting financial reward. Instead he simply proclaimed the word of God, proclaimed repentance welcome or not. And thus he was the greatest man born of woman, the greatest prophet, because he did his duty.

This is the moral of the story for us today, the meaning of these readings, to be like John the Baptist, to make sure that our minds and hearts are set on the Kingdom of God and upon Jesus. Johns mind was set on Christ, ours needs to be as well, we need to make sure that we are not like reeds swaying in the breeze. Does our loyalty to Christ remain strong, or do we so often seek fulfilment from the things in this world. Are we more concerned with fine clothes and possessions that world can provide; do we have other Gods that go before Christ in our lives.

It is indeed a great contradiction that this advent season of preparation for Xmas is the ultimate annual test of where our hope and trust is, there are so many temptations of money, food, possessions that try to turn us away from the true meaning of Christmas; or winter festival as many prefer to call it. This year we also have the additional worries and anxieties of the economic hardships so many are

going through at this time, with so many in such great need, and also the conflicts and divisions in our world. So more than ever this year we should ask - This advent are we really waiting patiently for the Lords return, are we waiting to celebrate his first coming 2000 years ago and are we also yearning for his return in glory. Perhaps the answer for most of us, including me is a mixed one, we try, but fail, there are so many demands on our time, problems we have at work and at home, relationship problems and money worries. So many things that stop us looking beyond the here and now, and looking to the eternal.

So this advent let us therefore take advantage of the grace God offers us, to help us prepare spiritually, to help us to be strong in the midst of the temptation around us and put Christ back into Xmas, to yearn for him, to have him as our ultimate priority. Every year at this time I talk about the sacrament of reconciliation or confession, John the Baptist did preach REPENT, turn away from sin, every year I remind people that it is still part of the faith, it is still part of our catholic life, that it is a grace a gift, a place to be forgiven and spiritually refreshed, a gift that helps us put Christ back at the heart of things, a real way to experience his love and care, a way to get back on track.

So please take advantage of the penitential here in Church this Monday at 7pm here in Church. It is my prayer that many parishioners will come forward to receive the grace of the Sacrament of reconciliation, to receive the gift that it is, to help us not be reeds swaying in the breeze or be nothing more than consumers of goods and money. Through the grace given to us in confessing our need of forgiveness, and our need of Gods strength and inspiration, Christ can truly be with us this coming Xmas, helping it to be a truly blessed and holy celebration; a time when we truly rejoice at our salvation. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice