

3rd Sunday of Advent (A)  
(Isaiah 35:1-6.10 / Matthew 11:2-11)  
11.12.2022  
*See & Rejoice*

The theme of today's whole celebration is joy. We began with St Paul's invitation to "rejoice in the Lord always", then the opening prayer invited us to celebrate the Lord's forthcoming Nativity with "glad rejoicing", and in the Preface we give thanks for being able to rejoice, exultant in praising the Lord.

Are we in the mood for rejoicing? Is there not within all of us a small voice which dampens our joy as it reminds us that there is a war in Ukraine, that the UK is going through a financial crisis and that the democratic process in Northern Ireland is blocked by some politicians? Added to that, as if it was not enough, we must acknowledge that in our families and communities there are women, men and children who are wounded and who suffer in their body and in their mind. Are we really in the mood for rejoicing?

The fact is that this question may not be relevant for us today. In putting the emphasis on joy and rejoicing the Church is not concerned about our mood but about our faith. The point here is not to dismiss completely the importance of laughing at a good joke, or being witty and having a healthy sense of humour but to highlight the fact that Christian joy is more than all these things.

According to Jesus' words, the most important thing is not to be in a good mood but to use our eyes properly. It is striking to notice that, in today's Gospel reading, the verb "to see" is found 6 times in 10 verses. For us, as for the psalmist, our joy is in the Lord (cf. 104:34), in discerning his features on the faces of all men and women, in seeing him in all his works (cf. Ps 104:31).

This is not as easy as it sounds and this explains why, according to St Augustine, "what calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eyes of our hearts, with which God is to be seen." (*Hom.* 88:5)

The healing of the eyes of our hearts is not optional, in fact it is necessary and quite urgent.

There are many reasons which can justify St Augustine's claim that we cannot delay to invest all our efforts in this healing process. I just would like to highlight two aspects which need our particular attention:

- the first one is that, at the moment, not only are we surrounded by many crises but we are also informed in real time, and reminded many times a day, that the world is not secure and trustworthy. The constant flow of negative and alarming news can overwhelm us and blur our vision to the point that we become driven by fears, robbed of the joy of being in communion with one another, more cynical, individualistic and self-reliant. In this context the point is not to be blind to reality, to the difficulties and challenges which unsettle us but to refocus our eyes so that we may face reality, deal with the facts and change what can be changed.

Very often we are stuck in the mud of a particular situation because we are blind to the real issue, wasting time and energy with what is not essential. We need to have discerning eyes which look at the world as it is, which meet people where they are, eyes that are perseverant in their desire to see the truth and to act upon it.

- the second aspect is that because of the pressure of time and the complexities of the many questions which assail us we are tempted to look at people and at things in a very superficial way. Satisfying ourselves with appearances we do not really connect with people; neglecting

to look at the many facets of the great questions of our time we are unable to find answers and to move forward. The challenge is to take time and to go deeper. Instead of skimming the surface, it is about looking with discerning eyes in order to go beyond what is seen at first sight in others and in the world. Reality reveals itself in all its richness when we approach it with time and perseverance, with openness and respect.

In his love for us, God has chosen the world which surrounds us, the women and men whom we meet as the set and the actors for the story of our salvation.

For you and me the challenge is to keep our eyes open so that we may see what really matters, what is genuinely good and life-giving, what is a true source of joy.

None of us wants to be in the position of those who, in Jesus' parable, asked: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" (25:44)

When was it Lord that we looked and did not see because we were too self-centred, too narrow-minded, too superficial?

According to St Paul, we are supposed to become what we look at: continually seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are progressively being transformed into His image (cf. 1Co 3:18).

The call to rejoice today is rooted in the conversion of our gaze to Christ. When we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord, whatever the mood and the season, we reconnect with our deepest identity and we are surely grounded, then we can experience deep joy because we find the strength we need for the journey which lies ahead.