

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we enter into the Third Sunday of Advent, we celebrate *Gaudete Sunday*, or *Rejoice Sunday*. The priest typically wears a rose-colored chasuble and the rose-colored candle is lit on the Advent wreath. We are now almost mid-way through this liturgical season and its milestone is marked by a spirit of joy and anticipation of what awaits us at the conclusion of the Advent Season: the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In expressing joy, we are moving spiritually apace with a greater spirit of urgency and anticipation.

Today's readings are emblematic of the joy the People of God have experienced when they have felt the closeness of the Lord in their midst. Although the Jewish people knew hardship through captivity and slavery, and indeed knew thirst and hunger and the strangeness of a foreign land, they ultimately understood that God would not abandon them. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* refers to the opening stanza of Isaiah 61 in terms of a summons or a vocation. Isaiah recognizes that God has appointed him to proclaim to the people that God is indeed in their midst. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners."

Is this not our Christian vocation as well: to draw people out of despair into hope and spaces of darkness into the open air of light. We do this in a practical and tangible way by how we treat others, how we speak to them and treat them. We do this when someone is in distress and needs compassion and empathy. This is done when we feed the hungry and visit those who are in the hospital or in prison. These concrete acts of mercy give relevance and belief that God is indeed in our midst. True and authentic justice is fundamentally rooted in acts of kindness predicated upon an awareness that good works come from God's initiative and how we chose to respond. The late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, a convert from Judaism after World War II and subsequent Archbishop of Paris, wrote extensively on the inter-connection between the Christianity and the Chosen People of Israel. In his book *The Promise*, he speaks directly to the vocation of light.

"This Messiah reveals the sin of the pagans, of Herod, by making himself their victim; he is thus the instrument of forgiveness through his Passion. God's power triumphs by saving him, by making the Messiah a survivor of death rather than allowing the destruction of the innocent. This is what we are as Christians. Not having escaped a sudden death, but united by God's power to death offered with Christ, and, therefore, the first-fruits of the hope for all nations which remains under the power of death. The specific characteristic of pagans is to be those who do not know that the darkness can be transformed into light, who do not know that they are sinners, that they can be forgiven and that death can be vanquished, by God alone, the source of life. Our time is the time when darkness and death still reign, and when, nonetheless, we are charged with bringing forth the light."

We are indeed charged with revealing God's light - His Son - to the world. John the Baptist, as we read in today's Gospel, was not the light but he came to shepherd in and herald the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. He did so with great poverty and humility - indispensable and necessary gifts for a strong, vibrant and living spiritual life. May we follow his example this Advent Season and beyond!

--Fr. Tom