

Gaudete

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O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient
to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight.

Our text may be found in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians chapter 4 and verse 4:

'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.'

Today is Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, Refreshment Sunday. Advent, like Lent, is a time for spiritual discipline. Lent prepares us for Easter – the death and resurrection of Christ; Advent prepares us for Christmas – the birth of the Christ child. But today, when Christmas Day is still twelve days off, we have a chance to take a break and to enjoy – to rejoice. The Latin for rejoice, Gaudete, used to name today, is the imperative form of the verb. Gaudete tells us in no uncertain terms that we should rejoice. And that is precisely what Paul is saying in our text today not once but twice, repeating the order so that there should be no mistake in our minds about what exactly we should be doing –

‘Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.’

Now that is a challenge: in the face of everything that could happen, the bad as well as the good, still to be able to rejoice. Not easy given for example the fact of the atrocities in Paris a month ago on the evening of Friday 13th November. So let me ask two simple questions of what seems to be a big ask – **to rejoice in the Lord always** – ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’

Why? Why should we rejoice? And the reason is in the season. Advent is all about looking forward to what is to come. First and foremost, Christmas: the incarnation: the birth of the baby Jesus: the Word made flesh: Emmanuel – God with us. Now that is what makes Christianity distinctive among the religions of the world: our belief that our God loves us enough to come and be with us as one of us. Secondly, at a time we know not, the Second Coming: the end times when Christ the King will come to judge the World and to establish the new order of peace and justice, the Golden Age. Being in front of him, on trial, doesn’t sound too good, especially knowing that none of us is perfect but, by God’s grace, we can all be saved and come home to him.

How? How can we rejoice always? Simply by being connected. By being in touch with that which gives us energy, that which allows us to be centred and balanced. We are not alone, on our own, although we are each individuals with individual differences: different tastes, different likes, different dislikes. But each of us can be connected to God by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is here for us but we can ignore him if we choose. We have eyes but we don’t have to look;

we have ears but we don't have to listen. And the secret is how we make sense of things: in the face of evil where the innocent are killed because they do not share the same world view as their killers, not to be overwhelmed by our sense of horror at the horror. To see the good that can come out of the bad; to see the good in the face of the bad: the care, compassion and sacrifice of people one for another.

I'm not sure I could rejoice confronted by the evil of Nazi Germany. I'm not sure I could find joy in the face of the SS. I'm not sure faced by ISIS I could smile. But what I am sure of is the challenge to rejoice, to be positive, because no matter what, God loves me, God loves you, God loves us. In God's eyes, we each have value and we are all being called to mirror his light in a dark world.

So are you up for it ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

13th December, 2015

G: Sermons 33 : Gaudete

