

3rd Sunday Advent (C)

- As we approach Christmas, we experience an incessant & increasingly intensive attack from all quarters to buy gifts, especially now that the restrictions of Lockdown on going to the stores have been lifted.
- Of course, the lockdowns have not restricted on-line purchases.
- The great gift we Christians focus on is the gift from God - the person of Jesus, & we supposedly exchange presents to remind us of this greatest of gifts.
- And as we move towards the feast of God's gift to us, we are presented with readings that prepare us to be receptive to that gift.
- This Sunday's Gospel once more presents John the Baptist who has a particular place of honour in our tradition.
- He was the cousin of Jesus who leapt for joy in his mother's womb when Elizabeth received a visit from Mary.
- He was the one who lived as a radical prophet, wearing animal skins & eating locusts & demanding a radical change in the way people lived.
- Our generation likes to close an eye to that aspect of John's life, because he's a bit embarrassing, but it is this aspect, this demand for continual & radical change, that fascinated people over the centuries.
- In today's Gospel the people gather around John & ask, "What is it that we should do?" - not what **others** should do to prepare for the Kingdom.
- Not how the government should change to prepare for the Kingdom; not how the Temple worship should change to prepare for the Kingdom, but, simply & perhaps the more difficult question, what shall **we** do?
- Three times in today's Gospel we heard the question "What must we do?"
- The answers John the Baptist gave to those who asked him what they must do were all about the way they treated other people?
- John told the people to be charitable; that they should give the poor of their surplus; the tax collectors are told to be honest, not using their position to enrich themselves; soldiers are told to stop harassing & intimidating people.
- John the Baptist challenged the people to love. He also challenges us.
- He challenges us to adopt a whole new attitude in life, an attitude of love that's directed to the other.
- This is the love that others will witness in us as a sign that the Kingdom of God is near.
- Paul put it this way to the Philippians. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone, for the Lord is near."
- So, what is it we should do today to prepare for the coming of Christ?
- The first thing we can do is to look at how we treat other people & then make & effort to be kind, considerate & loving.
- John the Baptist was a radical.
- He called people to make a radical change in their lives.

- Sometimes we let the sentimentality of Christmas get in the way of the call of the prophet.
- Christmas is about a radical change in the world & a radical change in ourselves – to be life-giving & not sapping the life out of others.
- And it is in being life-giving that we find joy & wherein we find Christ.
- Jesus is not hiding from us; it is we who hide from him.
- Did you notice that our Scripture readings for this 3rd Sunday of Advent are about joy?
- As people who bear Jesus' name we have every reason to have a deep joy, a deep joy that is always there even when sometimes the circumstances of our life can cause a deep sadness. Quite a paradox!
- Advent is a time for joy, not primarily because we are anticipating the anniversary of the birth of Christ, but because God already lives among us – all we have to do is be perceptive of God's presence & activity in our midst.
- The readings for today assure us that God is with us, not as a judge but as a Saviour.
- Advent joy springs from the realisation that the presence of God in our midst can so transform our lives that the promises of peace and security will be fulfilled.
- Advent joy is the way we live in the tension between already and not yet.
- So how do we attain this deep inner joy?
- Some time ago I read an article that claimed that the people of the Catholic Church today lack passion. Do you agree?
- Are we not passionate about Jesus, about his family the Church, about the values of the Gospel for daily life?
- If not, then what must we do to be passionate?
- God is a Divine Lover with one message: 'I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord. I repeat, what I want is your happiness.'
- Let's ask, "What must we do" to be receptive to this passionate God?, & let's prayerfully listen to the answer.