

## Homily at Mass 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent Year C – 16 December 2018

The Nativity scene is already arranged in front of the altar – but no Jesus: what a chilling thought!

Can we imagine a world without Jesus Christ? A world without the Gospel. A world without the Cross and the empty tomb. A world without the Trinity. A world with no sense that God is Father of all people, with no idea that God is love.

Rose vestments tells us that today is different in the season of Advent. Rosy pink is the colour of the dawn, the sign of a new day, a new beginning. A new day brings with it new promise, a new hope, new goals, new opportunities. The Latin name for this Sunday is Gaudete; a day of joy. The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah calls us to sing and dance today. “Shout for joy ... shout aloud ... rejoice, exult with all your heart: the Lord is in your midst!” St Paul also joins the chorus of praise of joy today – he encourages us: “I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord ... the Lord is very near”.

“The Lord is in your midst”. In 10 days time it will be Christmas – a great feast for faithful Christians. We celebrate the day like everyone else in our society – exchanging gifts, decorating our homes, singing familiar and much loved Christmas songs and carols, enjoying Christmas foods and feasting.

During the week I held a straw poll with our children at St Anthony’s school. Hands up who has a Christmas tree already set up at home? Everyone. Hands up if you also have a Christmas crib perhaps near the tree, or on display somewhere at home? Nearly everyone. This is fantastic. This is something all of us should be proud of. This tells us that our families remember that the Lord is very near: that Christmas is Christ’s Mass – Christ’s feast – Christ’s birthday.

It could seem that John the Baptist has missed the memo about the joy of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent Sunday. There’s a sense of sharpness or curtness about his preaching today, as he calls people to put their lives in order if they are to be ready to welcome the Messiah when he comes. But his preaching does anticipate that Jesus will demand of those who want to follow him – both John the Baptist and Jesus calls us to generosity, justice, fairness, responsibility, honesty. But perhaps these things are not as stern or bleak as they seem. In the public discussion about religious freedom in Australia a Jewish family from Caulfield said that they want their children to grow up in a community where traditional religious values like fidelity to the law of God, a living morality, and loyalty as citizens are valued and promoted especially in their school education. A Catholic man who lives in western Sydney said this: “the number 1 priority for me is to do God’s will ... You are a better person. It has a positive impact on the community. If I am not able to practice my faith and I go down hill with my morality, the community suffers”.

These two people testify to the joy that gives us deep peace today. The joy that the Lord is near – the joy that our world is not without God. That God has made his home among us in his son, born for us at Bethlehem. The birth of Jesus announces the Gospel that God is with us, that God is love, that God loves all humanity, that he loves and knows you and me personally, intimately, that God’s love is a saving love that strikes us every time we look up at the Cross. Our special joy is that Jesus, born at Bethlehem, our crucified and risen saviour, is God’s gift to us in Holy Communion. This is the joy of Sunday – the Lord’s Day, a day which fills the working week with sweet perfume, that gives our lives purpose and meaning, that gives us hope and a sense of fulfilment.

Be happy ... always happy in the Lord!  
Shout for joy ... shout aloud ...  
Rejoice, exult with all your heart!  
The Lord your God is in your midst!