



# The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

74 Grange Road, Glen Huntly VIC 3163

☎ Telephone: 9401 6336

✉ [glenhuntly@cam.org.au](mailto:glenhuntly@cam.org.au)

💻 [cam.org.au/glenhuntly](http://cam.org.au/glenhuntly)

ABN: 70548 570 366

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## Homily at Mass 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent Year A – 15 December 2019

Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was Archbishop of Saigon in Vietnam. Just after his appointment as Archbishop in 1970's he was placed under house arrest, and then transferred to prison and long years of solitary confinement. After his release he was asked about his prison experience – what was it like to be alone 24 hours a day? How did he keep his sanity? He told stories of how he was able to celebrate Mass on a few occasions by himself, dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, holding a few crumbs of bread and a drop or two of wine in the palm of one hand – the bread and wine had been spirited into the jail by some friends; Archbishop Van Thuan said as much of the Mass he could remember, with no Bible, no Missal. He also drove the Communist authorities crazy as he successfully converted his guards to Christianity one after the other.

But he also said that dealing with silence and loneliness had its toll on his psychological state, his sense of well-being, his sense of hope and trust in God. He said that this sort of imprisonment turns you in on yourself so that you begin to doubt, fear and feel frightened and scared.

It's this sense of fear and doubt that comes to mind as we hear about St John in the loneliness of his dungeon beneath King Herod's palace today. John begins to think about his call as a prophet, his preaching of repentance, his ministry of Baptism. What was it all for? What fruit had it borne? Is Jesus actually the Messiah, the Christ?

Today is the joyful Sunday of Advent. We see the joy of this day in the brighter coloured vestments and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent candle – we see the light of the Advent wreath growing brighter and stronger: the light and joy of our Saviour's birth draws nearer and closer each day. Our joy is confirmed as John receives the answer to his question: "Are you the one who is to come ...?" "Tell John what you see and hear," Jesus says to John's followers, "tell him ... the blind see ... the lame walk ... lepers are cleansed ... the deaf hear ... the dead are raised to life ... the Good News is proclaimed ... do not lose faith in me".

By now we've all probably put up the Christmas tree at home, decorated the house, sent and received some Christmas cards, worked on our Christmas presents and talked about arrangements for Christmas Day. We're beginning to wish people a 'Merry Christmas' – good friends and neighbours, people at the shops, work mates, everyone. The opening prayer of today's Mass asks God to help us to feel all the joy our Saviour brings. The joy we feel at the news of a baby born in our family. It is also the joy you and I understand as believing and faithful Christians. The joy of knowing that God has never forgotten his people, the world he created; the joy that the Lord Jesus, Son of God is also a Son of Mary; he shares our humanity, he knows from the inside what it is to be born into a family to be loved by Mary and Joseph, to grow up and learn, to worship God in a community, to work, to enjoy the company of friends. One Christmas carol puts it this way: 'he feels for our sadness and he shares in our gladness'.

The joy of this Sunday is found in the goodness and beauty of nature – Isaiah sings of the beauty of Mt Carmel in northern Israel – an abundance of beautiful flowers, their colour, their variety, their sweet perfume. St James talks about the joy of farmers who see their crops grow after the hard work of tilling the soil, sowing the seed, and waiting for rain, getting ready for the harvest and bringing it in.

The joy we feel at Christmas is purified by an encounter with the Lord of life and joy and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let's not leave that off our 'to do' list in coming days.