

Sunday December 13th, The Third Sunday of Advent, 'Gaudete Sunday'

'Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, Gaudete. Dominus enim prope est.'

'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed the Lord is near.'

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And so we come to our third weekend of Advent.

I guess we are all painfully aware that all our Christmases are going to be somewhat different this year, but Christmas is still a time for celebration, and this Sunday is reminder of just that. On this Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete or Rejoicing Sunday, we are presented with some of the most joyful and hope filled readings in the whole of the Scriptures, to remind us that the joy of Christmas is on its way. It's called 'Gaudete' after the opening antiphon, which I've put at the top of this message, and for the first time I will be wearing a new rose coloured vestment, lighter than the purple of the rest of Advent.

First of all we continue our readings from the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11. Isaiah lived in unhappy times, with the constant threat or actuality of war. His words and prophecies constantly fell on deaf ears, with no-one wanting to listen to the man. And, according to Jewish tradition, like all the great prophets, he was put to death. Yet in his descriptions of the Kingdom of God the spirit of peace, hope and joy, is all pervading. Isaiah knows his words are truth, and if heard and heeded, will bring about the happiness people so desire. And because Isaiah recognises the truth of his spirit-filled message, he is happy: I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. The presence of the Lord, the coming of the Messiah, and the fulfilment of these wonderful prophecies is all that Isaiah wants and needs.

And that's all that the apostle Paul wants and needs, too. Like Isaiah Paul had many difficulties in his discipleship, and the Thessalonians to whom he wrote were complaining that the Second Coming was not coming soon enough. So what does Paul have to say in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24? *'Be happy at all times. For all things give thanks to God.'* For both Paul and Isaiah true and lasting happiness has not been something easily achieved, nor do they present it as such. In seeking happiness for his readers, Paul urges them to constant prayer, to good actions and the avoidance of evil.

Even whilst preparing for the coming of Christ, though, John the Baptist does not seem to be such a happy figure. In John 1:6-8, 19-28 his ascetic lifestyle, curt responses, and condemnation of the Jewish hierarchy, do not do him any favours, and his own ministry involves confronting people with their sins, that they might repent and be baptised for Christ's coming. And yet John could not have lived, and died, as a prophet had he not had within him a glimpse of the glory and happiness of the Kingdom of God. Did not his mother Elizabeth say that in her womb John leapt with joy at the presence of Jesus in the womb of his mother Mary? John knew of the happiness and peace that only Jesus could bring, and his prophetic ministry was a witness to this peace and happiness, as he pointed the way to Jesus.

Isaiah, John, and Paul. Prophet, witness and apostle, each seeking to draw us closer to Christ, each knowing the joy that only the presence of Christ can bring, but each also aware of the things that seek to draw us away from that true peace and happiness. True peace and happiness involves hard work, prayer, thanksgiving, thought, care, and, as we have seen for Isaiah, John and Paul, even suffering. Above all, though, true happiness involves the presence of Jesus, hence our four weeks of Advent to prepare for the celebrations of his coming, hence the twelve days we have left to perhaps gain a glimpse of the happiness of Isaiah, Paul and John. Gain a glimpse of their happiness, so that, as St. Paul says, *'the God of peace will make us perfect and holy, and kept safe and happy, for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.'*

*Father in heaven,
we offer thanks to you for sending Isaiah and Paul,
and John the Baptist to prepare the way
for the coming of the saviour.
Help us to heed the Baptist's message to repent
and to renew our commitment to live in holiness.
Come Lord Jesus.
Come and ease our anxiety.
Come and reward our patience.
Come and remove our sorrow.
And come and bring us true and lasting happiness.
Amen.*

So let's go tell ev'ryone the news of the Kingdom of God has come, as we sing 'God's Spirit Is In My Heart.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKkVvdf8Z2I>

Well one of the ways in which our Christmases will be different is the fact that we won't be allowed to sing, although we are hopeful of a few solos. Never the less, we can still listen to our Christmas

Carol CDs, and here's a Christmas Carol Quiz for your delectation this Sunday afternoon. It's not too taxing! The answers are after the sign off of this Message.

1. Can you give the second line of 'Come, come, come to the manger...'?
2. What is the English version of Adeste Fideles?
3. How is a priest called Joseph Mohr remembered at Christmastime?
4. Why would his friend, Franz Gruber, be remembered also?
5. Which carol has the words: 'Yet, in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light?'
6. What 'came upon the midnight clear'?
7. Complete the line: 'Once ___ ___ ___ city stood a lowly cattle shed'.
8. Why need nothing dismay the merry gentlemen?
9. Who said: 'He who sings well, prays twice'?
10. Which City gives its name to a carol with the words 'Herod the King in his raging'?

And let's hope that one day soon we can joyfully carry out the sentiments of Psalm 98:1-7

*Dear Lord, I sing to You a new song
because You have done marvellous things.
I am in awe of the works of Your salvation!
I shout because the joy You give me is uncontainable!
I praise You with the harp and with the sound of singing.
I pray that all music is to glorify Your great Name.
You are an awesome Father,
I choose to worship You in Spirit and truth in all that I do,
Amen.*

I attach a couple of pictures of the beautiful Christmas tree in School, filled without children's prayers. God bless them.

Have a lovely Sunday.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.

1. Children come to the children's King
2. O come all ye faithful
3. He wrote the words of 'Silent Night'
4. He composed the music for 'Silent Night'
5. O little town of Bethlehem
6. That glorious song of old
7. in royal David's
8. For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas Day
9. St. Augustine
10. Coventry