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15 December 2024 -<sup>3rd</sup> Sunday of Advent "C"

[So 3, 14-18; Phil 4, 4-7; Lk 3, 10-18](#)

### HOMILY

The first two readings we have heard, from the prophet Zephaniah and from Saint Paul to the Philippians, call us to joy. That's why this third Sunday of Advent is called 'Sunday of Joy' ('Gaudete Sunday' as we used to say when we used Gregorian chant).

This call to joy may seem incongruous to us in today's world, where there are so many wars, so many senseless massacres of innocent people, so many tragedies experienced by thousands and even millions of people uprooted from their country and forced to seek asylum elsewhere.

It so happens that the prophet Zephaniah, who calls us to joy in the first reading, was himself writing in a time of war. His call to joy is not based on victory over the enemy, but on the fact that the Lord himself will make the enemy turn back. The joy will not be in crushing the enemy, but in renouncing war.

As for John the Baptist, it is difficult, at first sight, to see in his life and his message a call to joy. But it all depends on how we understand joy. When we think of joy, we think of festivities and banquets, of good food and drink. But John drank only water and his diet was limited to a menu of locusts and wild honey!

When we think of joy, we think of elegant clothes, whereas John's wardrobe consisted of a garment of camel hair and a leather belt!

When we think of joy, we think of a comedian or entertainer who knew how to make people laugh and help his audience to feel good about themselves. For John, the root of joy lies in the awareness of doing God's will.

In the Gospel text read last Sunday, we heard John the Baptist say to the crowds: '*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his path. Every ravine will be filled in, every mountain and hill will be made low*'. The crowds seem to have understood his message because they ask him - as we have just heard - 'What shall we **do**?'

In reality, there are three distinct groups of people asking John the Baptist the same question. The Evangelist Luke no doubt wants to show by this the universal nature of the call to conversion. First of all, there are the Jews of the same race and religion, who obviously make

up the majority of this crowd. Then there are the Publicans, who are Jews by race, but who are marginalised by their compromise with the foreign power occupying Palestine. Finally, there were the soldiers, who could only be Roman soldiers (taking their orders directly from the governor Pilate), and who were therefore not Jews, but who had nevertheless come to listen to John's message and no doubt to be baptised by him.

To all these people, John the Baptist gave a **concrete** answer to the very **practical** question they were asking: 'What should we **do** '? So it's not a question of knowing what to think or what to believe. It's about knowing what to 'do'. Jesus' entire message is along the same lines. The ultimate question, both here on earth and on the day of judgement, will always be 'How have you acted? and more precisely 'How have you acted towards your neighbour?

In John's three responses to the various groups, he does not mention any religious practices, but rather emphasises the demands of justice and especially of sharing, starting with the sharing of the most essential things in life: clothing and food. This attitude of sharing obviously requires first and foremost that we do not steal, as John reminds the tax collectors, and that we do not do violence to anyone, as he reminds the soldiers.

This Gospel message reminds us that true joy does not come from possessing a great quantity of goods, but from the communion that is embodied in sharing and in respect for justice, which is respect for each person seen as a child of God. So, right at the beginning of the Gospel, the principle is affirmed - a principle that will later be repeated in many ways: that communion with God is impossible without communion with our neighbour.

As for this communion with our neighbour, it cannot be reduced to vague feelings of sympathy or kindness, but implies total respect for justice and even the sharing of material goods when this is necessary to eliminate imbalances.

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