

Homily **3rd Sunday of Advent** (16.12.18)

**Knowing, loving & serving Jesus,  
brings believers a deep & lasting JOY**

I was reflecting on the readings this week, and I don't know whether you noticed that first reading, how many times the word "joy", including the word "rejoice", occurs. I think it's about five times, four or five times, haven't recently checked it. And so I was a bit intrigued because this is joy Sunday, Gaudete Sunday on the cusp of the coming of the Messiah, the joy of liberation. And I thought, out of interest, I'd consult the modern Catechism. Here it is. Small, isn't it? [laughter] And I looked in the index at the back for joy, and I found only three references to very small paragraphs that mentioned joy, and then they don't tell you what it is, just tell you it's a gift of the Spirit. So I wonder if they really want us to have joy in the church. And yet the Scriptures do. Scriptures are full of the word. But this week, that's emphasized. It's in that second reading, but it's badly translated in the Jerusalem Bible. The revised standard version has the better choice, it says

"I wanted you to rejoice, always rejoicing in the Lord."

So today is focused on JOY...

And I think that's really good to focus on joy because happiness is a dodgy thing. It comes from the Greek root "Hap", which means to take your luck, chance, as in 'haphazard'. And happiness doesn't last, does it? It comes and goes. One day we're happy, another day we're unhappy. And it goes with mood and with all sorts of influences on us in our life. Whereas joy is something much deeper. Joy is something that's lasting, even through suffering, because it's rooted in something to do with, I think, a profound sense of belonging to God, of a momentous occasion or event in our lives that sustains us. And I can give you one example as a man, and that's giving birth. I've not done it recently, [laughter] but think of the pain a woman goes through, and even St. Paul refers to it, he says,

"A woman rejoices after her labour, that a child has been born into the world."

And joy is the only word you can use. That total bliss that remains. I mean, how many women here have been happy in labour? I won't tell you what my mother said it was like. [laughter] But did you have joy? Yes? Yeah. And this experience is a good example, that even in pain, you can have profound joy. And that's the sort of joy that God gives us as a virtue, that's the virtue to be worked out, joy in the Lord. You see, the prophet was talking about restoration and liberation of a people scattered by persecution, and what joy that would bring. And you can see that when people in terrible circumstances have been liberated from evil regimes or prisons. You wouldn't say they were happy, you would say they have the relief of joy. So from their pain came joy and a joy that they never forget. If you've seen people interviewed on telly, they say,

"I will never forget that day I was liberated."

And that's a sort of liberation that Jesus came to bring us at Christmas that John is proclaiming, the good news; the liberation from our human condition that leaves a profound joy.