



Third Week of Advent: 13th and 14th December 2020

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“My Spirit Rejoices in God my Saviour.”

I was reminded when preparing my weekly Reflection “The Burning Bush” which a small team of us work on to put out online each weekend, of the lovely Carol/Hymn “Gaudete gaudete Christus natus est Ex Maria Virgine” translated “Rejoice, rejoice, Christ is born of the Virgin Mary – rejoice.” It is from the 1500’s and is inspired by the opening verse of the Entrance Antiphon for this Sunday’s Mass which comes from the Letter to the Philippians Chapter 4.

While the Church in Advent reminds us of the importance of preparing in a spirit of prayer and penance for the coming celebration, and St John the Baptist is once again central in the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday saying: “I am as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness; make a straight way for the Lord”, the joy and rejoicing at the coming Birth of the child Jesus breaks through. So, the psalm comes from St Luke Chapter 1 and takes up Mary’s song of praise at God’s choice of her to be the Mother of the Saviour:

*My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her
nothingness:
henceforth all ages will call me
blessed”*

It is as if the joy of the expectant young mother cannot be held back in the life of the Church Community. My mind goes back to a wonderful visit I made to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the 1990s. The Festivities are being kept there this week, 12th December being the Feast. The young Mary who appeared to St Juan Diego was with child, as is depicted in the type of garments she wears in the image of her left on the cloak of Juan Diego whose Memorial is 9 December.

Millions of people flock to the Shrine every year, and it has great significance in these days we live in: the Mary who appeared was like the indigenous Indian people of that part of the world. Pope St John Paul II who canonized Juan Diego drew special attention to this, and of course Pope Francis has emphasised the importance of the Church identifying with the people and customs of places like Amazonia, particularly most recently in proposing an Amazonian Rite in the Church’s rich Liturgical traditions.

Interestingly the Carol “Gaudete” was taken up by a folk rock group Steeleye Span and became a hit in the 1970s. It was one of only 3 top 50 hits to be fully sung in Latin; the others were Pie Jesu and In Dulci Jubilo. When Gaudete was sung in Top of the Pops, the

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resident dance troupe walked onto the set in medieval style clothes, holding candles, followed by members of Steeleye Span.

Yes, the sense of joy and rejoicing as we prepare to celebrate the Birth of Our Lord is all around us, the Church proposing a rose coloured vestment (a lighter purple colour) for this Sunday's Liturgy. And, in more normal times there would be Carol Services and School Christmas Plays.

But, let us not forget the cry of John the Baptist in the midst of the celebrations that are already underway. We too are to make a "straight road" for the Lord into our hearts, "For any Christian, this is the first order of Christmas business and its core concern" writes Fr Joseph Pollard in his Homily for the 3rd Sunday. And he recalls Barclay the Scripture Scholar's commentary in which he speaks of the roads of the Middle East in those days being no more than tracks. When a King was about to visit a Province, the roads were smoothed and straightened out. John was simply preparing the spiritual road for the Messiah, so that He could travel "more easily into the waiting hearts of his people".

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