

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (B)
11TH DECEMBER 2011

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Be excited, celebrate.
What a great command, as we leave this morning we must take our rejoicing with us!

I often wondered why today is called Gaudete Sunday, but quite simply it refers to the entrance antiphon, that is the verse we use at the beginning of Mass to set the scene. Rejoice is the translation from the Latin verses from Philippians 4 which are used. So, today is 'Rejoice' Sunday.

Why are we rejoicing? It's not Christmas yet. Well, half way through Advent the church lightens the mood and encourages us to continue our spiritual preparation. We are celebrating because Christ who redeems us is already with us, unknown to us.

Perhaps, just as we heard John the Baptist in today's Gospel, we don't recognise Him.

Yet God is often nearer to us than we realise.

Are we ready? Christmas is nearly here! Mind boggling-God becomes a man! Have we prepared for Jesus?

We have today 2 groups who in an extra special way are getting ready for Jesus. They are doing what John the Baptist said, making a straight way for the Lord. I am referring to our wonderful children preparing for Holy Communion, and those courageous adults on the RCIA course who offer us a great example.

Advent is a time of preparation and this is exciting, especially for children. The readings have emphasised repentance, which means recognising our mistakes and really wanting to improve / change. We sometimes forget that advent is a penitential season, similar to lent, which is why we are wearing purple; ideally Advent will include a special effort for prayer and fasting.

Our preparation also probably involves wrapping presents, decorating the house and a tree. When we have someone special coming round, we want things to be right for them. (We may even have a shower, put on make-up and do our hair)...We also prepare ourselves emotionally. At Christmas, it is Jesus we are preparing for. So, what present have we got for Jesus? I think the present he wants from us, is us...

Remember if we come here thinking we are doing God a favour we have missed the point. God doesn't need us but He knows we need Him, so he gives us Himself. We have to hear what John the B was saying, repent.

The priests and Levites who came to question John the Baptist were important people, they expected him to show them a lot of respect and honour, yet he answers their questions by simply quoting from the Old Testament "I am a voice that cries in the wilderness; make a straight way for the Lord". Everything John did pointed towards Jesus. His questioners were educated and academics, but they missed the point. They weren't interested in his message of repentance they only wanted to know who John was but. They could have known Jesus but they missed out – are we, like them, too proud to recognise our own need?

We need to acknowledge we have all done things wrong; we are sinners – not a concept modern world (or us) accepts. But let's think. If we hurt someone we love we feel bad, so do they. How many relationships have gone wrong because this hurt has not been openly addressed? A simple, honest, sorry, restores the relationship and everyone feels better and moves on. Relationships with friends or loved ones get stronger.

So to help us make our relationship with Jesus stronger, on Tuesday 13th there is a penitential service here, look how easy Father is making it for us. We can look at ourselves with honesty, perhaps spend just 5 minutes to reflect on Paul's letter we heard today's second reading;" for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus. Hold onto good and avoid evil." – do we thank God for all things; hold onto good and avoid evil...?

Let's recall the words from Isaiah in the first reading. If we take them on board, we will realise this is someone we want to have a stronger relationship with.

Isaiah tells us that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, how God has clothed us in the garments of salvation, he even compares this to a groom in his finery and a bride adorned in her jewels. Let's get closer to this God who considers us so precious.

Today, let's act – how can we make a straight way for the Lord; let's examine ourselves and get to confession and let's make sure Jesus IS known to us. Let's do what Paul says and thank God for all things (have an attitude of gratitude). Parents, if you don't already why not this week look at your children and each day thank God for them. Children do the same to your parents; or look out the window every morning and say thank you for today? It's nearly Christmas, let's share the excitement that comes from our hope in Jesus.

Turn our focus towards Jesus. Then we will certainly celebrate the truth of Christmas which is Jesus among us, known to us. Rejoice, Jesus is with us, let's give Him the present He wants. It's His birthday soon!

Rev Jonathan de Kretser