

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Year A** (Isaiah 35:1-6.10; James 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11)

### **Homily**

There is a clear note of rejoicing in today's mass. Today is known as 'Gaudete Sunday'. The word and hope, because in Jesus, the promise of the Lord God Yahweh is fulfilled. It is very obvious from our Gospel text that John the Baptist was a practical man. Christianity is a practical and social religion. The second and third Sundays of advent Gospel reading is always centred on the life and ministry of John the Baptist. I have a short story to illustrate John's role in our salvation history: Some time ago, there lived an extraordinary 'Gaudete' means rejoice. Today is otherwise known as the "Rose Sunday". The basis for the rose and for rejoicing is that the Lord is near. We are invited to live a life of joy y lamp lighter whose name was Mr. Tim. He was utterly reliable and as punctual as clock. He was blind. Each evening, at the onset of darkness, the lamps unfailingly came on. How he judged the time, nobody knew because he had no wrist watch. People often watched from the front of their windows as he went down the street lighting lamps and leaving trails of lights in his wake and everywhere. What made Mr. Tim's work extraordinary, after all there are many people who loved their work and did it faithfully? Tim was so special because he was blind. He was so faithful in bring the light to every other person except himself. He never saw light because he couldn't. Suddenly, electricity came to his country village, and that meant that his job was finished. He felt so bored staying in the house doing nothing. He felt useless and sad. People who used to adore him for his generosity now forgot all about him. After all they now had electricity which came automatically on and does not go off. He spent his days and night alone in his basement flat. This story demonstrates the life and mission of John the Baptist. John worked diligently to bring the light and introduce him to his people. For a while, he dominated the scene and enjoyed great popularity. He was always conscious of the fact that a greater light was coming and did all he could to prepare the way for that light. When the light eventually came in the person of Jesus, he gave way to him. He disappeared. In his own words, he said "He must increase while I must decrease". No person comes to prominence all on his/her own. There will always be somebody who is in the background facilitating and whose task it is to lead, guide, direct and encourage. In other words, who prepares the way for him/her. When the person has come to fame, the facilitator drops out of sight and frequently is forgotten. To make way or even to make room for another person require a great deal of humility and generosity of spirit. It calls for a kind of dying to self. Some people spoil things by holding on too long to power and authority.

**Parents** spend a great deal of their years in preparing the way for their children. When the children are grown, they gradually give way for them to shine and blossom. All of us are tempted to hug unto limelight for far too long. We sometimes, inadvertently perhaps, dominate others and relegate them to the shadows. We must shine to the best of our ability while at the same time not blocking others from shining. We should be sensitive and humble enough to know when to give way for others. Only one who lives a life of joy can do that. Only one who does not take life too seriously can do that. We are not to run the race of life too seriously and miss the track. Let us live joyfully, one day at a time so we can live all the day of our lives. I like to end this sermon by telling the story of a couple who lived happily

**John's** situation was a grim one. He was locked up in a dark dungeon with a threat of death hanging over him. His faith was being severely tested. He needed reassurance and comforting. No doubt, Jesus' words was a source of comfort and strength to him. The comforting words of Jesus to John is also addressed to us today because sometimes we do find ourselves in dark dungeons or harsh situations similar to that of John. We might be going along nicely and then all of a sudden the storm hits us: unemployment, financial problems, illness, suicide, relationship problems, loneliness, depression. Edmund Burke says that loneliness is not the absence of people around us, rather is a situation that exists when people around us do not know or are insensitive to what is going on inside us.

**The greatest** astronomer, Galileo, was born near Florence , in the year 1564. He confirmed what Copernicus had said, namely, that it is the earth that goes round the Sun, and not vice versa. His discoveries greatly enlarged our knowledge of the universe. Yet he spent his last years in darkness. When summoned before the Inquisition, he wrote: "Alas, poor Galileo, your servant has been for a month totally and incurably blind; so that this heaven; so that this heaven, this earth, this universe, which by my observations and demonstrations, I have enlarged a thousand fold beyond their previous limits, are now shrivelled for me into such a narrow compass as is filled by my own body sensations."

Galileo reminds us of John the Baptist. Galileo ushered in a new age, a new world, a new knowledge and a new compass. Like Galileo, John the Baptist ushered in a new age, the age of Jesus. Like Galileo, he died in darkness, in a dark dungeon under the hatred and malice of King Herod Agrippa. John the Baptist was a holy, God fearing man, yet he ended up in a dungeon under the sentence of death. We can do our

best, but things may still go wrong. We feel let down by God. We doubt his love for us and perhaps even his existence. Sometimes, the thoughts of the sufferings of people around us saddens us and make us miserable.