

JMJ CHS

12-12-21 Third Sunday of Advent

On this Gaudete Sunday, all the readings today, with the exception of the Gospel, have to do with joy and rejoicing.

From our first reading,

*“Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!  
Sing joyfully, O Israel!  
Be glad and exult with all your heart,”*

And from the Psalm, the refrain:

*“Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you( in your very midst) is the great and Holy One of Israel.”*

And from St. Paul that famous line, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice.”*

With all of these it almost sounds like a command. “Be joyful!”, even when you are not feeling that joyful, or whenever you are surrounded by sadness and distress and uncertainty.

Well I guess it’s just another one of those “signs of contradiction” that set us Christians apart from all the others. We are called to rejoice because of the good news that God has visited his people. He has come into our world and is our savior. And he’s coming again. To rescue us. To save us from ourselves. And all will be well.

I guess the question is, can we really, somehow, believe that? Is it one of those circumstances where we say, *“Yes, Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.”* I do see a lot of very devout Catholics who go around wringing their hands, worried, nervous, anxious and fearful.

But let’s switch gears and talk about John the Baptist. He is certainly one of the major players in the Christmas story. We have our beautiful statue of him over there performing the noble task of baptizing his cousin, Jesus. Now, for any of you who have been following *The Chosen* series, you know that the baptizer was given a special title by none other than Simon Peter, the fisherman who would become our first pope. He referred to the baptist as *“Creepy John”*. I suppose, by most people’s standards, John was a bit unusual. He lived in the desert by himself, weather-beaten, eating locust and honey. His clothing was minimal and penitential in nature. Probably sack cloth, with a leather belt around his waist, and I’m sure he had a walking-stick.

At some point, *in the fullness of time*, filled with the Holy Spirit, John began to preach, and he began to attract people to himself. And they came in ever-greater numbers. Some out of curiosity, but others sincerely, looking for that long-awaited Messiah. And some were actually prepared to repent, and be baptized. And many asked, “Could John be the Messiah?” But he made it perfectly clear. “No”, he said, “I am not! One greater than I is coming, whose sandals I am not worthy to unfasten. I have baptized with water, but he

will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.” “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

Nevertheless, his influence continued to grow and today’s passage shows that his audience was really quite diverse. Among the crowd were even tax collectors and soldiers. I wonder if these were Roman soldiers? That would have been interesting, but not surprising. Jesus himself would have several positive encounters with Roman soldiers.

But the common question they all asked John was, “What should we do?” They were looking for advice from someone they perceived to be a holy man. How should we conduct ourselves in this crazy world? So, aside from the baptisms of repentance that wiped away their sins, John was also a **mentor**, answering their questions directly, with a simple wisdom, and common sense.

The major point that I would like to make today is that we, too, can be John the Baptists in our present world. We, too, can be mentors to those we encounter. I don’t think many people out there are willing to listen to us these days, but some are. And I do think a day is coming when being a mentor could be easier. I can imagine before too long, people coming to us in desperation and asking us questions like, “*What should we do?*”

What types of things would you tell them? Before I go any further, let me give you an example of what we could be talking about here. This is a story told to me by one of our parishioners just this past week, on Thursday, the feast of St. Juan Diego. I thought it was very timely that I should hear the story because of today’s feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The man was in Mexico City on business and once the business was out of the way, he wanted to do some touring. And he had something specific in mind. He approached his hosts and tried to make arrangements for transportation. The conversation went something like this:

*“So, where would you like to go, to see the Pyramids?”*

*“No.”*

*“How about the financial district?”*

*“No”*

*“Well, then, what would you like to see?”*

*“I want to go to the Basilica and see the Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe.”*

*“Oh no, no, don’t bother. You wouldn’t want to go there”*

*“Well, yes I actually would. I’m a Catholic and I want to see it. And if you don’t take me, I’ll find my own way.”*

Well they, of course, agreed and assigned a young lady to drive him to the Basilica. They parked the car and walked the last few blocks to the Church. They had to step over and between many pilgrims who were camped out on the ground, waiting for their time in line to make their visit. When they finally got to the Basilica, the young lady got kind of

emotional and admitted that she, along with most of her friends, had abandoned the faith of their childhood. But, based on this encounter, it seemed as if she was prepared to return to the practice of her Catholic faith.

The mentoring, here, was really very simple. All it took was just a little courage and taking a stand for what one believes in, and insisting on it. And look at the results. And who's to say, maybe she returned to the office to re-evangelize her colleagues. To mentor them in a return to their faith.

I know that most of you here have a lot of life experience under your belt, and more than a little accumulated wisdom. And I trust your faith is strong. You could certainly encourage people to live a good life. To be kind, generous, patient, honest. You may also have to mentor a person into repenting. Maybe you know of a hidden lifestyle that the person is involved in. You may have to be blunt and say things like, "You know that pornography is not good for you. It could ruin your life." "You know that sexual promiscuity is not good for you. It could ruin your life." "You know that marijuana use, that you think is so innocent, well, it's really not good for you. It could ruin your life."

You get the picture? We can all be mentors. But first off we should be approachable. Do we smile? Are we kind? Gracious? Are we good listeners? are we calm, detached and filled with joy? Or, are we judgmental, argumentative, smarter than thou, holier than thou? Are we worried, and nervous, anxious, and fearful just like the rest of the world?

Remember, as Peter once said, "***be always ready with an answer for those who ask you about the hope that is within you. But answer them with all gentleness and respect.***"

And even more, do we know what we're talking about? If you're going to advise somebody about the truth, do you know how to explain and defend it? This requires study, a little bit of grace and a little bit of rehearsal as well. There are apologetics classes and people have even written books on how to answer certain questions.

As for my part, I have decided that a good way to answer a person who takes issue with some answer that I might have provided is, "Well, the church teaches that..." Fill in the blank. The only Church that Christ founded teaches with authority. And then be prepared to share a few scriptures like, "**Whatever you declare bound on earth will be bound in heaven,** or "**He hears you, hears me, and he who hears me, hears the one who sent me.**" And there are many more.

Let us just all pray that that day comes quickly when people will literally come to us as they came to "Creepy John" in his wilderness, and ask us, "What should we do?", and that we will be able to give them sound, wise advice, reassuring them that there is, indeed, cause for rejoicing here.

*~Fr. John*