

## ADVENT 3A

*The lighting of the pink candle reminds us that Christmas is fast approaching. Today is 'gaudete Sunday'. The angel said to the shepherds; 'behold I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared among the people. Today in Bethlehem a Saviour has been born to you'*

Joy has far deeper connotations than pleasure. If not checked the pursuit of pleasure can become the driving force behind many of our decisions. Compared to our grandparents or certainly great-grandparents generation our tolerance level of pain or discomfort is very much lower than theirs. Hedonism or pleasure seeking has been described as one of the overriding characteristic of our age. The danger is that it can cause us to focus too much on ourselves at the expense of others. There's a warped form of pleasure in sin and excess. We can get it at his expense, at her humiliation. Even revenge can be sweet. How often have you heard it said; 'they got what was coming to them'.

Those who seek pleasure, whether innocuous or harmful, usually find it, albeit briefly. What pleasure lacks is permanence. It's like the soft surface of an unruffled lake – one brisk wind and it's gone. But there's calm water below. That's where joy resides. Pleasure can be seen as the artful dodger. It often finds its home in illusion and in a fantasy world far removed from reality. But like December sun and December snow it comes and goes.

I would also say that there is no true joy that is not the outcome of some struggle, some endurance, some contest. The second reading today talks about the farmer waiting in patience for the seed to take root and grow. All his hard work beforehand preparing the soil and fertilising it, sowing the seed, watering the ground ultimately pays off at harvest time. The writer of the

psalm put it like this: 'they go out, they go out, full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing: they come back, they come back, full of joy carrying their sheaves. Just like the seed growing, Christian joy takes time to mature. It takes nine months, for instance, before a baby is born but joy is the eventual outcome when the baby arrives. Mary, despite the abject circumstances of Jesus's birth, must have experienced this joy and indeed she said as much to her cousin Elizabeth – 'my soul rejoices in God my Saviour'. Before his passion, whilst at the last supper, Jesus prayed that the disciples would share his joy to the full. But as the angel said to the shepherds, the joy of Christ's birth is to be shared with others.

But joy in itself is contagious. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone' the saying goes. We talk about people being full of the joys of spring. I had a businessman visitor, Anthony, here from Cardiff on Thursday night and everything he said was uplifting and affirming. Even though I barely know him, he affirmed me in my priestly vocation. He had the joy of the Holy Spirit radiating from him.

*So let us pray that the same joy of the Holy Spirit may also radiate from us this Christmas and may no one be allowed to take it from us.*