

### **THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT B/2005**

The coming of Jesus is a joyful event that brings about consolation and happiness to the world. When it occurs, God will fulfill all human expectations and his promise to save us. Therefore, the Christian should be a cheerful person, because he knows from now on the inheritance to which he is called. Rich or poor, sick or healthy, the Christian should always be happy. This is the reason why St Paul enjoins the Thessalonians to rejoice always. Christian joy should not be confused with earthly pleasures. It springs up out of a thankful prayer, from a calm heeding of the Holy Spirit talking to our hearts and an eagerness to do good and to reject evil. A community grounded on these foundations becomes “holy”; that is, totally different from all other types of associations or groups of people. This holiness is the work of God.

In the same way, Christian joy finds its foundation in God. It is He who gives it to all men and women who hope in him. The 1<sup>st</sup> reading of today describes precisely the prophecy announced by the prophet Isaiah about the Messiah. He comes to bring hope, courage and healing to the brokenhearted; he is anointed to bring joyful news of consolation to the needy and the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and the prisoners, to declare a year of favor from the Lord. The prophet rejoices also, because he is sure that God will keep his promise. He is so sure of the love of God that he already starts celebrating salvation with a song of joy. As seed sprouts and the plant grows into a big tree, thus, - he says - will justice grow and spread irresistibly into the whole world, because God has promised a Kingdom of universal peace.

It is evident today that the seed of justice in the world is very slow in growing, but in spite of this we should harbor the same trust and manifest the same hope as the prophet did. Many are the reasons that make us sad, and yet, like the prophet, we can begin to sing a song of joy for the salvation that will surely reach out to every one.

When we examine closely Jesus’ life, teaching and gestures, we can say that the prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled in him. He is the Messiah sent by the Father to bring salvation to the world and to set free all those who are captive of sin and evil. We rejoice, because God has wanted that in him we may be saved. He is our Redeemer; the Holy Spirit has been poured out abundantly upon him to announce to us, with mighty deeds, and in word, the time of the visitation of our God.

Today’s Gospel is all about the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus; he bears witness to him before the Jewish people. To bear witness means to stay in the background. A witness is not there to talk about himself or to draw attention on his own person, but rather on the one for whom he is giving testimony. This is what John does. He recognizes that he is not the Christ, but just his messenger. He is quite honest and is not misled by any false opinion of his person. He does not claim honors and titles that do not belong to him. He says he is neither the Christ, nor

Elijah nor any other prophet. John calls himself a “voice”. A voice is a combination of sound that conveys a message. Once a message is given, the voice disappears. The Baptist is just a voice that witnesses the coming of the light into the world, and then, once his mission is accomplished, he disappears for fear that people might take an interest in him, rather than follow the light. What a lesson of modesty and simplicity which should be ours in our activities within the Church in our Christian communities.

The coming of Jesus in the world is like the light dispelling the darkness. The Baptist was the first to recognize this light and to proclaim his presence. All those who accept Jesus come to light and are not in darkness. From the example of John, we learn that to come to Christ, the light of our life, there is only one way, namely the witness of someone who talks to us about him just as the Baptist did. Here we see the importance of human mediation in our knowledge of God. We count on one another to come to know God. May we help others to come to know Jesus.

The last thing I would like to say is about the presence of Christ among us. You know, for many years the people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah. But when Jesus came, they did not recognize him. Why? The Baptist kept repeating: “there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me”. In fact, something prevented them from recognizing him, namely their way of thinking and living. Ideas, habits, models from society burned their minds and hearts; and they were unwilling to change. The Baptist vainly tried to open their eyes and ears by urging them to convert.

The same thing could happen to us nowadays if we refuse to follow the light of Christ that some “voice” is telling us about. We thus run the risk of remaining in darkness and of missing our true joy. The time of Advent is precisely a good reminder to us that it is important to convert and to welcome Christ, the light of the world. Let us ask Jesus to help us to be attentive to the many signs of his presence among us. Let us prepare our hearts to welcome him when he comes in glory at the end of time. May God bless you all!



Homily Date: December 11, 2005  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20051211homily.pdf