

Advent 3 – Homily – Deacon Brian Cordeiro

I'd like to dedicate this homily to my friend and brother deacon, Bill Graham, who passed away a couple of weeks ago. Whenever I met Bill on a Sunday morning and he knew I was the homilist that Sunday, he would remind me before the mass began with the words, "Brian not more than six minutes. A good homily should be done in six minutes." So Bill, this one is for you.

As you well know, our Advent theme is The Time has come, Give us a Sign. From the first week of Advent, we have been looking at different signs that the time is now here. In the first Sunday of Advent, our sign was that of justice and for the Second Sunday, our sign was that of patience and in Advent, the liturgical colour is violet to signify repentance and turning towards to God. Each Sunday in Advent, we also light one Advent candle to symbolise that we are awaiting the coming of the light in our world as we await the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. This Sunday too, we are going to light a candle. What is different of this Sunday's candle?

Today, we light the only candle that is not violet, we light the pink candle. Pink is the colour of joy. Today is Gaudete Sunday (Latin for rejoice). Is it an anomaly that we should rejoice in a season of repentance? Definitely not. We rejoice because we know that a lot of good is coming our way and so our

readings overflow with joy today. *Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete*. This may be translated as "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice".

There are 3 principal reasons for our joy. The very first reason for our joy is: knowing who we are. We are people on whom the Holy Spirit has descended at our baptism. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me. To be anointed is to be blest to carry out a special mission. The reason that you and I have been anointed is to bring good news to the oppressed, the broken-hearted, the prisoners and captives. What a great mission! But we cannot bring joy to these people if we do not have joy in our own hearts.

The second reason for our joy is: knowing who has anointed us. The reading to the Thessalonians reminds us that the one who calls you is faithful and He will do what he has promised. So we are to rejoice and pray and give thanks because the one who promised us is faithful.

The third reason for our joy is being convinced of what God has done for us. Mary is able to rejoice and proclaim the goodness of God because she is totally convinced of the great favour that she has received from God. Lowly that she was, she knew that she had been bestowed a extraordinary favour by being chosen to be the mother of God. How awesome is that? And so she proclaims "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my

saviour.” But the birth of Jesus was not only something special for Mary; it is for each of us. The one who brings us salvation is being born. The one who is our God is now becoming one of us as a little baby in the manger. Like children excited for the coming of Christmas, so should we be for the birth of our Saviour.

But then what is John the Baptist doing on this Sunday when we celebrate rejoicing? Was John not the doomsday prophet? Did he not call people to repentance in a severe manner? Believe it or not, John the Baptist is the patron saint of spiritual joy. After all, he leapt for joy in his mother’s womb at the presence of Jesus and Mary (Luke 1:44). And it says that he rejoices to hear the bridegrooms voice (John 3:29-30).

Crowds were coming to hear John from all over Israel before anyone even heard a peep out of the carpenter from Nazareth. In fact, John even baptized his cousin. This launched the Lord’s public ministry, heralding the demise of John’s career. Most of us would not appreciate the competition. The Pharisees and Sadducees certainly didn’t. They felt threatened by Jesus’ popularity. But John actually encouraged his disciples to leave him for Jesus, the Lamb of God. When people came, ready to honour John as the messiah, he set them straight. He insisted that he was not the star of the show, only the best supporting actor. John may have been center-stage for a

while, but now that the star had shown up, he knew it was time for him to slip quietly off to the dressing room. And John found joy in this. “My joy is now full. He must increase and I must decrease.” Humility brings freedom from frantic bondage. Trying at every turn to affirm, exalt, and protect oneself is an exhausting enterprise. Receiving one’s dignity and self-worth as a gift from God relieves us from this stressful burden.

John says in the Gospel “Among you stands one whom you do not know.” I challenge you today to think of who is that person among you that you do not know. That person may be oppressed, broken-hearted or a prisoner of some kind and you are being called by your baptismal anointing to be a messenger of joy to that person.

May the Lord bless us with great rejoicing because we know who we are, how faithful God is and what great marvels He has done for each of us.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice.”