

Our Sense of Joyful Expectancy

St Luke in his Gospel tells us that the deeds of John the Baptist had created a *feeling of expectancy* among the peoples that he might be the Christ. John tells them very clearly that he is not. Last week we heard how John was very forthright in insisting that the one who was coming after him was going to be more powerful than him, and that he (John) was not fit to carry his sandals. This week the story has moved on, and we have John in prison, and he seems to be expressing concern about whether he was correct in his original certainty. His question to Jesus, addressed through his disciples, carries in it an element of hesitation. Jesus is quick to reassure John: *Go back and tell him what you hear and see...* Does the coming of Christ for which we are preparing during this Advent, lead us to joyful expectancy? This is the question which Jesus puts before us, just as he put it before the people he was addressing in the Gospel. The answer he offered them is the same answer he offers to us, and the challenge he places before them, remains salient to our age. We are asked to ponder on the meaning of the challenge.

Someone who is able to make the *blind see and the deaf hear* is surely someone who is endowed with special gifts. Of course we're not talking literally here about ourselves, but rather we are talking about the way in which each of us is called to bring about the 'making present' of the kingdom, and you can't carry out the work of the kingdom unless you are responding to that call in joy. There can be no such thing as a miserable Christian! Certainly we can have set-backs and mishaps. We can also easily become despondent and disappointed when our efforts seem to be thwarted, and our works go un-rewarded, but remember that Jesus said that this is the prophetic work of the kingdom which we are doing. And even if we feel that it seems to go unheeded and unnoticed, it still nevertheless generates joy, even if it is not necessarily seen or heard by us.

One of the joys of the Advent liturgy is to be able to read, listen to and savour the beautiful poetry of Isaiah. The images which are conjured up through his words explore in such glorious technicolour detail, the splendour of what we are to receive, as the expectation of what is promised comes to fulfilment. Just read the first reading from today's mass slowly, line by line, to yourself, and I'd be amazed if your hearts were not uplifted and moved with an expectant joy at what we are about to experience. The incarnate Word is to be born amongst us. How can we not feel joyful? If we are stirred up by this sense of expectancy, then we have risen to the challenge that Christ has set us, and we have and we are engaged with him in bringing the Good News to the poor.

On Sunday evening at 5.0 pm we have our Advent Liturgy during which will consider in prayer and reflection through the actions and words of Mary and Joseph, the challenge that our

Waiting on the Word presents for us and our world. It takes us back to that question of John ...*or have we got to wait for someone else*. Whenever we feel inclined to pose that question ourselves, we should understand that the answer lies not in the future but as present and active all around us in the deeds being done as we witness the lame walking and the lepers cleansed. Come and share in the joy.

Happy Gaudete Sunday.

