

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
12th December 2021 - 3rd Sunday in Advent - Gaudete - Rejoice

Readings Year C: 1st: Zephaniah 3:14-18. Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6. 2nd: Philippians 4:4-7. Gospel: Luke 3:10-18.

Fr Ronald Rolheiser is a Canadian priest who for many years has written a column of spiritual guidance in catholic newspapers. He has been to our diocese on a few occasions, especially to the 'Loud and Clear' conference in 2004. His wisdom, warmth and depth of understanding of our Catholic pilgrim journey was a beacon of hope and light for many of his readers.

About 10 years ago he was diagnosed with cancer and over a period of 7 months went through a gruelling experience of the various treatments his condition required. After the initial shock he set himself the task of using his illness and its treatment as a time of grace, during which he hoped to take some conversion steps such as slowing down his life, learning to be more patient and being more faithful in prayer. Like everyone, he always wanted joy in his life, but he had felt it would only happen when he was free from anxiety, pressure, overwork, illness and stress. Strangely as his treatment days passed he found himself living through one of the richer and happier periods of his life. He encountered joy in friendships, colleagues, even food and drink when he could taste them. He found joy at the heart of his suffering.

Gaudete Sunday bids us **rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice**. There is no implication that we are only to rejoice when we are feeling good. The message is **always**. The same conviction is picked up in our 2nd Reading. St Paul wants us to be happy, always happy in the Lord. Paul's message is that we are to be happy because the Lord is near. Paul calls us to pray, as Jesus does, **stay awake praying at all times**.

Both are saying be aware of the Lord's presence in your lives, whatever is happening.

John the Baptist offers a similar insight as he encourages his listeners to get ready for the Lord. To "What must we do?" he says: be honest, straightforward and generous in your lives.

In the midst of the on-going pandemic, as the going again gets tougher, remember, when the going gets tough, the tough get going. That is what we Christians are called to do. To bring some faith, hope and charity, love into life in these darkened days. The pandemic has changed for better or worse life as we knew it. Life is always changing: but this is a dramatic change.

Pope Francis, well before the pandemic began, spoke that in our times we are experiencing not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change. At the end of 2019, just two years ago he said: "We find ourselves living at a time when change is no longer linear, but epochal. It entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science." This is all speedily happening because of the pandemic.

St John Henry Newman wrote "Here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."

Naturally he is not speaking about change for changes sake, or for following every new fashion, but rather about the conviction that development and growth are a normal part of human life, even as believers we know that God remains the unchanging centre of all things

As ever the Liturgy of the Church leads and guides us through it all. Gaudete Sunday bidding us rejoice always in the Lord.

Emmanuel will come to us: is indeed with us.

Canon Philip Dyson