



Reflection 3rd Week of Advent 12/13 December 2021
by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Rejoice ... indeed the Lord is near.”

In my time as a Parish Priest in St. George and St. Teresa, Dorridge, a generous Parishioner donated Rose Vestments to be worn on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, “Gaudete” (Rejoice). The use of Rose Vestments was first introduced in Rome for the blessing of the Golden Rose in “Laetare”, or Mid-Lent Sunday, then it was granted everywhere for the Mass of that day; finally it was extended to “Gaudete” or Mid-Advent Sunday. Rose is a lighter shade of purple: in Lent it expresses some relaxation in Penance; at Advent however, it does not signify an exception but it expresses the joy that pervades the whole Liturgy of this season. The celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady fits in very well with this sense of joy at the coming of Our Lord. In the Archdiocese of Birmingham, of which Mary under this title is Patroness, there is always a special Mass at which the Archbishop presides, to mark the Solemnity.

In Rome there is a tradition that the Pope goes to the Piazza di Spagna, where the Column of the Immaculate Conception is, to place a wreath of white roses at the base of the column and to pray. This year, in Covid times, he went in the quiet of early morning at 6.30, so as to avoid creating the huge crowd that assembles in the afternoon, the usual time. Then he went before 7am to St. Mary Major Basilica to pray before the Icon of Mary “Salus Populi Romani”, Mary Protector of the Roman People, his custom after an Apostolic Visit abroad.

After the Pope left the Piazza di Spagna, a firefighter extended a ladder to place the wreath of flowers on the statue’s arm. Later, at midday, Pope Francis led a special Angelus in St. Peter’s Square: there he spoke of what made Mary Immaculate: “She does not lay claim to anything, for in her humility she knows she receives everything from God.” And, he went on to note the importance of the declaration that she was to be the Mother of the Saviour, being made within the walls of a house and not in a main square. He explained that within those humble walls “God changed history”, and even today, “God’s grace loves to operate there, more than in great historical events.”

The Pope invited all those listening to “ask the Madonna for the grace”: that she free us from the misleading idea that the Gospel is one thing and life is another ... Instead, he said, sanctity or holiness is about living humbly and joyfully with happiness each day, freed from ourselves, with our eyes fixed on God and the neighbour we meet.

“Let us not lose heart”, concluded the Pope, for “no one who asked for her help has ever been abandoned.”

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

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The teaching of Pope Francis leads us further into the joy of this Season and the expectancy that permeates the time leading up to the celebration of the Birth of Jesus. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession, I have been encouraging penitents to pray the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, especially the Annunciation, Visitation and Birth of Jesus, in preparation for Christmas. I recommend you do this using words from Scripture to reflect on as you pray each Decade. Father Lawrence Lew has produced a beautiful book. "Praying the Rosary with Sacred Art" where I found these words for the first 3 Joyful Mysteries:

The Annunciation: "And the Angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Luke 1:30-31

The Visitation: "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'

Luke 1:41-43

The Nativity of the Lord: "For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its full course was now half gone, your all powerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed.

Wisdom 18:14-15

In the book the Mysteries are beautifully illustrated with pictures from Art and a Reflection under each Mystery (It is published by CTS and is a good recommendation to friends who wish to make you a Christmas Gift).

The Rosary disposes us with the help of the Scripture to be open to the Word of God for us.

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