



3rd Week of Advent Sunday 17 December 2023

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Rejoice in the Lord always Indeed the Lord is near ”

(Philippians 4:4-5)

The Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally known by the Latin word beginning the Entrance Antiphon at Mass; “Gaudete” (Rejoice) Sunday which it takes from the letter to the Philippians Chapter 4 verses 4 to 5. Over a number of weeks now there has been joy in the air and the Church has been part of the celebration going on. Our focus has very much been on the cause of our Rejoicing: starting with St Nicholas Day on the 6th December, and in some parts of the world the commemoration of St Nicholas by children receiving sweets and fruit in their shoes on the eve of the Day. From Nicholas comes the word Santa Claus by way of the Dutch and German language: Santa has been bringing much joy to young children as they write to him and go to see him across the past month, bringing much joy to children and just as much joy to parents. I made a point in an earlier Reflection to recall the story of the Saint and what we are celebrating at this time of year. The Church is obviously concerned that we don’t lose sight of what we are celebrating and that we ensure that is passed on to our children. On the other hand, while some say don’t start the celebrating until 25th December, the Nativity of the Lord Jesus the Church “goes with the flow”, so to speak, and already we are celebrating his Birth. We have seen recently on the Internet, the wonderful raising of the lit-up Christmas Tree in St Peter’s Square with the bright shining star on top accompanied by the song of joy ‘Love Shone Down’. It is a lovely song ending:

*“Well did I dream or was I really on that hillside,
On that Christmas night so long ago,
When he was born Jesus our Saviour,
Sing a new song let everyone know,
Oh and love shone down,
Over the hills and over the valleys,
Oh and love shone down,
Over the world.”*

Crowds gathered with lighted candles: the rejoicing had begun in St Peter’s Square.

A beautiful article in the Catholic Herald online this week entitled ‘Piercing the darkness with light in profundity at Advent and Christmas’ begins:

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“Advent and Christmas draw us into the darkness: Advent to prepare us and Christmas to pierce the darkness with love, before the tiny light of Christ at Christmas grows into a blinding flash at the Resurrection.” The article by Gavin Ashenden concludes with quoting the Welsh Poet Dylan Thomas *“Do, do go gentle into that dark night, then, and praise, praise the coming of the Light.”* We live in dark times in terms of the conflicts that dominate world news, worry of economic downturns, and, sadness of personal bereavement. Into this comes the hope of the Christ Child that we will celebrate at our Christmas Mass and our visit to the Crib first created for us long ago by St Francis at the remote mountain village of Greccio. St Bonaventure tells us that in order to excite the people of Greccio to celebrate the birth of the Saviour with all solemnity, Francis brought together all the elements of the stable in Bethlehem into what would become the first ever Christmas Crib. Francis used real people, straw and animals to bring the Christmas story to life for the people of Greccio. People came from far and wide to see this spectacle. The night was aglow with candlelight as hymns were sung in praise of the God who is with us. The Irish Capuchin Franciscans write *“The crib remains a beacon of peace, hope and reconciliation and offers the opportunity for us to reflect upon the deeper message it represents.”* Our Catholic Schools and Parish Churches continue to offer us and our children this opportunity to get to the heart of our celebrations at this season.

Writing in the Sunday Mail recently Peter Hitchens (brother of the famous atheist, Christopher, now deceased) said *“in recent years Advent has receded in our minds. The last trace of it is the Advent Calendar, these days generally completely secular and crammed with chocolates to keep up the interest of the children But we have lost something that was very valuable, and which we might try to recover especially for our children.”* He ends: *“Today, I shall begin to say daily the great and ancient prayer for this season in which we ask: ‘Give us the grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in this time of mortal life, in which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility’. And so I believe he did, and everything is changed by this.”*

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