

Rejoice! Gaudete Sunday

We should expect some joy filled readings, right?

Victory over enemies

Some great miracle of Christ or his apostles

But what do we have?

The Israelite community in disarray

They have been defeated in battle

Most of them have been taken into captivity

The ones that remain are dispersed away from their homes and lands

This was years ago

And they were beginning to doubt God's promise of returning

We have John in prison

Condemned

Waiting for his execution

And we have St James with a new community of Christians

They had witnessed Christ's passion and resurrection

They had heard his promise that he would return soon

But again, years ago

And like the Israelites

They were beginning to wonder and doubt

When will he return?

So in all this it is normal to ask

What is there to celebrate here?

What is the cause of being joyful?

Here again we see

God's ways are not man's ways

The Babylonian captivity lasted almost 60 years

When they were defeated, they also received a promise

A promise that this would be temporary

And they would return home

But as the years went by

The people began to doubt

They longed for a return to what had been lost

Generations had passed without seeing what they hoped for

Now they were tempted to give up hope

This is what Isaiah was facing

He believed deeply that God would do as He promised

But for Isaiah it was not simply a return to what had been

But a promise of so much more

Something better than anything they imagined

This vision of the blind seeing

The lame walking

The deaf hearing

The promise was more than a physical healing

It was a promise of a new creation

All of creation was affected by the fall

And all of creation would be made new and whole again

**The new Christian community with James was experiencing
many of the same things**

They were waiting for Jesus' promise to be fulfilled

But they wanted fulfilled on their time schedule

When they experienced what they considered delays

They were tempted to turn away

James comes to them

They were closely tied to the land

So James puts it in terms they would grasp

Look at a farmer

He cannot control the rains

But for a good crop, he needs the rain

Early rain for a seed to germinate

Late rains for a bumper crop

And there are dry spells most years as well

God's kingdom can be seen in similar ways

Jesus's miracles and public works

These were the early rains

Germinating the seeds of faith in his followers

There would be dry spells

John the Baptist in prison was one such dry spell

Christ's passion, death and resurrection would be the late rains

Making for a fruitful crop

Take as an example of hardship and patience

The prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord

The prophets teach that our waiting will be over one day

And there is cause to rejoice in that

John teaches there is cause to rejoice

Even when circumstances don't appear that way

He is in prison

He sees his disciples are worried

They are at risk of losing hope

So he sends them to Jesus

Not for his sake, but for theirs

Are you the one?

Or do we wait for another?

And Christ replies for them and for us

In the words of the prophet Isaiah

Go and tell John what you hear and see

The blind see

The lame walk

Lepers are cleansed; the dead are raised

Jesus wanted John's disciples and us to know he was doing the works of his father

Keeping the promises made by the prophets

They were expecting a political king

One that would drive the Romans from their land

But this was not the Messiah promised

He would be a suffering servant

Freeing John from prison would be a human kingship

Christ comes as a divine kingship

He did not come to banish human suffering

He came to transform it

He comes to partially fulfill the promises made

Promises that Moses was aware of

When he led the Israelite people through the desert

Right up to the promised land

But he never crossed the border himself

John led his people through a mentenoia

A conversion and repentance that led them to the One who is to come

John caught only a glimmer of what was to come

Even the incarnation, the miracles and teaching of Christ

These were preparations for the ushering in of the kingdom

**A kingdom that would be established through his passion, death
and resurrection**

A kingdom we are called to build

Until he returns in his glory

When immortality will vanish mortality

When the darkness and doubt that sometimes accompanies faith

Is overcome by the Beatific vision

When this valley of tears

Is conquered in unending joy

The confident adherence to this is hope

**And it is that hope that allows us to endure any and all hardships
here and now**

Not just endure them

But to rejoice in them in hope

We'll close with a true story of hope

St Charles Lwanga and his 11 companions

All pages in the service of a Ugandan king

**Killed for their Catholic faith and rejecting the immoral advances
of the king**

At their execution, they were bound and wrapped with wood planks

Set like the spokes of a wheel

With the center set on fire

All of them were given the chance to deny their faith

And be saved

Instead, they encouraged each other

And died singing

Such cruelty and suffering

And such joy in their hearts

That is what Advent teaches

Hoping and knowing something so great is coming along

Today our penitential violet is changed to rose in anticipation

Advent prepares our hearts to receive the incarnation

This little baby who changes everything

Giving

us reason to sing

Even in the midst of a world gone seemingly mad