

## Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent 2020



Ten days ago I was up on Scout Scar on a beautiful day. It was cool but there was a bright sun in a blue sky, the snow was on Coniston Old Man in one direction and the Howgills in another. I walked past a couple and as usual said, ‘Morning’ expecting the usual terse ‘How do’ or ‘Cheers’ in response, only for the man to

stop and say, ‘It really is a beautiful morning isn’t it. When you see a view like this it is just good to be alive,’ and more in that vein. Even though I felt that already, his enthusiasm was infectious, and made you stop again and look more carefully. Somehow sharing it with someone made a difference, made it appear even more beautiful. I have no idea whether he was religious or not, but there is something in all of us that responds to the beauty of Creation, and which becomes praise of God whether we intend it or not.

Someone gave me one of the Pope’s recent homilies for Advent, which was a bit of a challenge to my very rusty Italian. His Italian is full of fun and clever word play, and one of his phrases was, ‘Per vivere, ma non vivachiare,’ which has a good ring to it. Lots of ‘v’s. What it means is that we need to really live life, not settle for just ‘getting along’. Every day, the Pope said, we are faced with choices, both about our daily lives and about life more long term, but the question that we should be asking, and that the Holy Spirit inspires us to ask, is not, ‘What should I do?’ but ‘What good should I do?’ That is the path of Christ and that is where we find our joy.

One of the things that the Pope is asking us is, ‘If someone asked you about your faith and your life, how would you be able to respond?’ Perhaps not said aloud, perhaps just to yourself. Would it be the equivalent of the mumbled greeting, or would it be similar to the words of Isaiah today: “I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God”?

This is what Mary chose to say (500 years after Isaiah) in response to Elizabeth's greeting when they met at the Visitation. Mary realised that for all the problems she and Joseph had had and were having, her child, Jesus, a gift of God, filled her with joy, and for all the ordinariness and simplicity of her life up till then (her lowliness), his presence had changed her life into something wondrous, and she has to share that.

The first reading is also just what Jesus quotes as he begins his ministry in Luke's gospel. Jesus is trying to understand both the energy he is filled with and the calling he has received. He had probably already realised he was being nudged towards something – but now he sees just what it is he has to do, and he takes these lines, full of joy and excitement: “The Spirit of God has come upon me,” and this Spirit of God is pointing him towards the marginalised in our world, the poor, the broken-hearted, captives, the prisoner, and also to share with others that the time of God has come. In some way he has realised that to really make this a full experience, he has to share what he feels, just like the guy who was moved to do on Scout Scar, or the bearing of witness by John the Baptist. Scary, yes, even for Jesus, but as he says: ‘God has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity.’ He feels he is not alone, that he is even protected. That is part of his joy, God being with him, wrapping his arms around him.

John the Baptist is trying to do the same for the people of his time. When the leaders of the people question him they frame all their questions on their own terms, what they know, not surprisingly. Any answer that fits in to these means they can comfortably pigeon-hole whoever John is and is speaking about. But John side-steps this and says simply, ‘He is the light.’

The light that wants to break into the ordinary, break others out of the ordinary, of the temptation to ‘vivachiare’, to just ‘get along’. To realise, as Saint Paul says, that we are filled with the Holy Spirit, just as the man on Scout Scar was, and never allow ourselves to suppress the gift of the Spirit, but on this Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday to let ourselves feel free to rejoice in being able to see, and be wrapped in, God's light.