

Homily. 2nd Sunday of Advent. Year.C. 8/9 December 2018.

St. Paul had a genuine love for all of the communities and Churches he wrote to, visited, worked with. He proved because he went to no end of trouble and suffering spending his life in teaching, encouraging and guiding them. It was different however, but in a good way, when it came to Church at Philippi. He had a special place in his heart for that community, a particular affection which we hear so easily in his letter this weekend.

Paul tells us that he prayed for them with joy remembering how they had helped him in spreading the good news. He says he missed them all, loving them in the same unselfish, sacrificing way as Jesus. All Paul wanted and prayed for the Philippians, with whom he had none of the worries or disputes he experienced with some of the other Churches, was that they would keep on growing in love for each other and in their knowledge and perception of what God wanted so that they could be perfect when Christ returned. If you're after some reading from the bible for this Advent season you could do little better than read the 4 short loving and joyful chapters of his Letter to the Philippian community.

Joy is a Christian virtue, a sure sign that we're alive in Christ Jesus. This is how it works; Our faith in Jesus abiding love for us and in His resurrection victory gives us hope in every circumstance. This hope allows us to be joyful even in the face of adversity, set backs and suffering. Our joy then shows itself in the freedom we have to choose to be loving, just and kind, even to strangers, even to enemies, as Christ is to us all.

There are obstacles that stop us being and living this way? Outright disbelief in and serious doubts about the Lord's love and resurrection power for us and within us is clearly such an obstacles. Another is excessive cogitating and ruminating over our hurts, real and perceived, which brings us low, blocking us from exercising our Christ won freedom to live lives worthy of the children of God, the sisters and brothers of Jesus. Idle and ill informed gossip about others is another habit that quickly robs us of the hope and joy Christ offers, going on to multiply hurt and cause division in our faith communities. Gossip is something Jesus never did and a habit roundly condemned by St. Paul.

Counting our mishaps and troubles rather than our graces and blessings is another hope destroying practice, turning our focus inwards, blocking us from moving outwards in love and service. An attitude of privilege, so easily cultivated, is a further obstacle for us in living the joy, hope and love of Jesus. It gets us thinking that we've the 'right' to do say and broadcast our opinions as we please, without courtesy or consideration of others, their own limits and the overall aims and good of the community. At its worst we end up with a black and white mindset 'my way or the highway'. This was the precise downfall of all of those people who were in power when John began his witness, the same people who would go on to bring and end to Jesus ministry and life. These are a few of the mountains and hills that have to be laid low, the valleys filled in and the winding ways straightened up in us so that we can welcome with joyful expectation the coming of our Saviour. This is the message of God's word for us now. Hear it, take it to heart, change and we'll come alive in Christ.

