

Homily. 3rd Sunday of Advent. Year.C. 15/16 December 2018.

This past Thursday and Friday we celebrated two feasts. First up on Thursday was St. Lucy, a young woman and virgin martyred in Sicily in 304AD under the reign and persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. St. Lucy has been venerated across the world since that time. Her name is related to the Latin word for 'light' and 'radiance'. Her courage brought out the light of Jesus love standing up for what was right and true. Her trust in God, even in her suffering and death, radiates encouragement and faith today as she's done now for 1700 years.

Friday brought us across to 16th century Spain remembering an honouring St. John of the Cross, a Carmelite Priest and Doctor of our Church, renowned is his writing and teaching. John worked with St. Teresa of Avila to reform the Carmelite Order, enduring imprisonment and great suffering for his troubles. His writings and poems are some of the greatest ever written about prayer, mysticism and the spiritual life. John is considered to be the Spanish equivalent of England's Shakespeare, Spain's national poet, an author of classic poise.

Much suffering and sacrifice are found in the life of both Lucy and John, leading her to martyrdom and him to months of solitary confinement, physical torture and starvation. You'd be right to wonder what these two Saints have to do with this Sunday of Advent firmly focused on rejoicing as it is? The connection is that Christian joy and rejoicing has its root in what God does for us, not in what we manufacture or do for ourselves.

When the people of Israel were invaded, their country sacked and all that they loved reduced to rubble with the best of them taken off into exile, many lost their faith and hope. There was nothing left to rejoice over, nothing at all to lift their spirits, except for those few who remained faithful in their stubborn belief that God was on their side and would somehow save them. 50 years went by before things changed and they were set free from their suffering. Those who had stayed faithful were brought back to their own land of promise, empowered to start afresh. It was this experience that Zephaniah was writing about in the 1st reading; God had repealed their sentence; they had no more evil to fear; God was dancing over them with joy and renewing them by God's love. When the people were powerless, reduced in every way, only God could do something to save them, and God did! After long months of prison and trial only God could help free St. John of the Cross, and this work God did, too.

John the Baptist shone a light before Christ's coming. He called people to integrity and right living, urging them to change their path before it was too late. Later, when confronted with the powers of King Herod and his Royal Court, John courageously spoke out the truth of God's word. For his troubles, and at a drunken whim, he was martyred. Yet as Jesus said, a great horn of women than the Baptist there has never been. In a different age and for different reasons, but for the same cause, St. Lucy shone out her courage lighting up the darkness of persecution and repression. We still celebrate her heavenly birthday, the day of her death brought light and courage to believers, every year across the globe.

Faith gives us hope when everything looks and feels hopeless because our faith isn't placed in our own powers, nor in authorities or institutions. We know full well that they're as flawed as we are because we're making and sustaining them. Rather, like Sts. Lucy and John of the Cross we put our faith in God, in what God is doing now and plans to do for us.

Sometimes what we have and take so much for granted must be ended, dying so that we can be born again to a better way forwards, a new way of thinking and living. This is always hard, a real suffering and grieving for us as anyone who's lost someone or something they loved well knows. The gift we have that makes such all the difference during our trials is our faith. It gives us hope, always, for God is with and with certainty we know that Christ has come, saving us from ourselves and the worst us all.

This is the source of our inner joy, our rejoicing and our courage in all loss and suffering. It frees us to give witness even when times are tough and the tides are running against our very best efforts. God never ever gives up on us. Remembering this truth of our faith, neither can we afford to choose to ever give up on ourselves or each other. What we do is what has always been done by Lucy, John of the Cross and of all the Saints. We choose to rejoice in the mist of all the mess of humanity and living, for as the Psalm sings out, God is among us, the great and Holy One on our side taking our part.