

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday has traditionally been called Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means rejoice. *Gaudete* was the first word of the entrance chant in the pre-Vatican II Mass: “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near.*” Gaudete Sunday marks the mid-point of Advent, so we rejoice that our time of waiting is almost over. As a sign of rejoicing at the nearness of Christmas, the church invites us to put aside violet vestments for one day and wear rose vestments. In the ancient Roman Liturgy, today was a very festive day.

In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist is once again the major figure. In the second part of the Gospel, after John’s disciples leave Jesus, Jesus praises John the Baptist. First, he told his listeners that John was indeed a prophet, but he was more than a prophet. He was the precursor, the one who announced the coming of the Lord. Second, Jesus told his listeners that among human beings, there had been none greater than John but qualified that by reminding them that even the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. Also, the Old Testament had prophesied the return of the great prophet Elijah. A couple of verses after the end of today’s Gospel, Jesus would say, “*And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come*” [Mt. 11:14].

However, I think the more important part of the Gospel is the first part when at John’s request his disciples asked Jesus if he was the one who was to come or should they look for someone else. Jesus responds, “*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.*”

When we hear the miracle stories in the Gospels, I think that sometimes we are tempted to think of them as random acts of kindness on the part of Jesus. In most cases, Jesus healed people whom he encountered and who asked for healing. Therefore, we read them as signs of God’s mercy and compassion, which indeed they were. However, they were so much more. They were the fulfillment of the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, the coming of God’s kingdom, as we heard in today’s first reading. When Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God was near, he was not saying that it was not here yet. His coming brought the kingdom of God in an initial way. These miracles proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was in their midst in Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, if the kingdom of heaven was in their midst then, how much more is the kingdom of heaven in our midst now after Christ’s death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit. Instead of looking at or for all the bad things happening in the world, we need to look for the signs of the coming of God’s kingdom among us. Wherever there are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, these are the signs of God’s kingdom among us. We must be careful not to miss them. At the same time, we still see a lot of sin, suffering, and sickness in the world. St. James challenges us to be patient as we await the final coming of the Lord and to make our hearts firm, i.e., make them strong in the face of suffering. In his encyclical *Saved in Hope*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that we are worth so much to God that he became human in order to suffer with us as revealed in Jesus’ Passion: “Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with us*; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God’s compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises¹

¹Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 30 November, the Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, in the year 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html, 39.