

Advent 3-C

Installation of Father Wilfred Gomes

St. Mary's, Chilliwack

16 December 2018

Dear Father Wilfred, Father Mark and dear parishioners of St. Mary's Parish:

Introduction

Today this community of faith gathers to give thanks and praise to God, and especially to express its gratitude and prayerful support of Father Wilfred Gomes, because at this Mass he formally assumes the ministry of serving as your pastor, succeeding the dedicated ministry of Father Edwin Neufeld who served as parish administrator this past year.

What can you hold Father Gomes accountable for as your shepherd? His principal responsibilities are directed to helping you lead holy lives rooted in the Gospel. And how does he do this? What "tools" has the Church placed in his hands as an ordained priest? He is to proclaim the Good News to you vigorously and persuasively; he is to celebrate the Sacraments with you and for you, above all Holy Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation; and he is to build you up as a family of disciples where each parishioner is engaged in serving the parish and the wider community.

In a parish each person has an irreplaceable part and responsibility to carry out for the common good of all. We are "one body, one spirit" in Christ. The pastor is like the orchestra conductor who leads his

people, but is also utterly dependent on them. One of the most deeply moving moments in the Rite of Ordination of a priest comes when the candidate lies prostrate before the altar as everyone present, clergy and laity, invokes over and over again the intercession of the Saints. Nothing more visibly portrays that the man who is giving himself to God in order to be a steward of the mysteries of faith for others needs the support of others if he is to be faithful to his vocation. He is able to love with the strength of Christ because he himself is loved by God and by those whom he is called to serve.

Thanks be to God, your community is alive with the Spirit of God and is welcoming family: a community which treasures and passes on the faith to its children and grandchildren by prayer, catechesis and Catholic schooling; a community which shares its time, talent and treasure with others; and a community which lives its faith with hope, indeed it rejoices in hope.

“Rejoice in the Lord, Always” (Phil 4:4)

“Rejoice in the Lord, always; again I will say, Rejoice . . . The Lord is near” (Phil 4:4,5), writes the Apostle Paul, as we heard in our Second Reading. Advent, far from being a gloomy liturgical season, is also meant to be a time of rejoicing. During these days we are called to prepare our hearts and our lives for the celebration of the wondrous event which has taken place in our history: the birth of the Son of God in

the flesh.

The rejoicing to which St. Paul invites us, and which forms the heart of the Advent season, is not a shallow or forced “Christmas cheer.” It is an appeal to recognize the real cause of Christian joy.

What is it that should make us joyful? The simple answer is that God, despite the immeasurable inequality between the Creator and us whom he has created, has bridged the gap. He has searched us out and built a bridge of friendship with him. Indeed, he has made us his sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of his Son, Jesus. “The Church is not a haven for sad people, the Church is a joyful home!”¹

Notice. God is the one who establishes this friendship. We cannot buy it even with our good works. Our friendship with him is always a gift born of his loving initiative. Recognizing this invites us to live in joyful gratitude for this completely unmerited gift.²

If we allow the Lord to draw us out of our shell and change our lives, then we can do as St. Paul tells us: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4). It is this joy of a personal relationship with the Lord that sees us through the inevitable times of trial and suffering. Hard times may come, when the cross casts its shadow over

¹ Francis, Angelus (15 December 2013).

² Cf. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 54.

our life, yet nothing can destroy the joy that always endures, because it is born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved by God. Such joy brings deep security and serene hope.³

The opposite of a joyful disciple is one who is indifferent to God's love or mistakenly thinks he or she is excluded from that love. This often manifests itself through cynicism, meanness of spirit and smallness of mind and heart. If we find that we are harsh in our judgments and unwilling to forgive, harbouring resentments even against members of our own families, and for years, then it is no wonder that St. Paul's admonition to "rejoice" falls on deaf ears.

God's Joy over Us

This emphasis on rejoicing can perhaps annoy those who are hurting. If you are burdened with the weight of anxieties, a call to rejoice seems meaningless. Yet Advent calls us out of this gloom. We must return to basics – that God is already rejoicing over us! – and allow that truth of his love to soak into our hearts and minds. If God rejoices over me, who am I not to respond in the same way?

One line in the First Reading puts it very well. The Prophet Zephaniah, speaking to the Jews of Jerusalem, says that the Lord "will

³ Cf. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 125.

rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love. The Lord your God will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival” (Zeph 3:17-18). Now apply this to yourself. Because of you, God will rejoice and exult! The tables are turned. We do not have to manufacture happiness or put on a smiley face. We just have to recognize the Lord’s joy over us! Have you ever in your life thought that God might be exulting with loud singing because of you?

The cause of our rejoicing, therefore, has a solid foundation. And this is brought to the fore by St. Paul. Why is it? Because “the Lord himself is near” (cf. Phil 4:5). The joy to which we called to live and to give witness is that which comes from God’s closeness to us, of his presence in our lives.⁴ In truth, God is close to us, so close that he makes himself a child.

“Christians are a joyful people, and our joy is not something superficial and ephemeral, but deep and stable, because it is a gift from the Lord that fills life.”⁵

Share the Joy

The joy that Advent reawakens is not meant to be reserved for us

⁴ Cf. Francis, Angelus (14 December 2014).

⁵ Francis, Angelus (13 December 2015).

alone. “Joy must always be shared. Joy must be communicated.”⁶ It is to be proclaimed to everyone: that being with Jesus, that following the Gospel, brings a joy and fulfilment that surpasses all merely human happiness. Of course, “we cannot be messengers of God’s comfort if we do not first feel the joy of being comforted and loved by him.”⁷

Think of all the sick and lonely people in your life who, in addition to being tried in their body, are also sorely tried in spirit because they often feel abandoned. How will you share joy with them without disrespecting their suffering in the coming days?

Think also of those people whom you know, perhaps in your own family, especially the young, who have lost their sense of true joy and seek it in vain where it is impossible to find it: in the rat race of self-affirmation and financial success, in false amusements, in consumerism, and in the artificial paradise of drugs and lust. To this world of “the orphans of joy” you can bring the Good News of God’s love for them.⁸ Remember that if we “focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence.”⁹

⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily (18 December 2005).

⁷ Francis, Angelus (7 December 2014).

⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (17 December 2006).

⁹ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 128.

“This is the real commitment of Advent: to bring joy to others. Joy is the true gift of Christmas, not expensive presents that demand time and money.”¹⁰

Conclusion

Now let us proceed with the Rite of Installation of Father Gomes, as we accompany him around the church to the different places from which he will care for you with the prayer and Sacraments of the Church.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily (18 December 2005).