

Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook

12 November 2021

Welcome

During the week, there was a significant change of power in Germany. After 16 years as federal chancellor, Angela Merkel was replaced by Olaf Scholz. In her speech she gave remarkable advice to her successor, as follows:

"You may suspect that it is an exciting, fulfilling task, also a demanding task. But if you approach it with joy, it may also be one of the the most beautiful tasks there is to bear responsibility for this country."

I found it remarkable that after all the hard work, immense challenges and with all the difficulties facing not just Germany but the world that Mrs Merkel could speak of joy.

Topic

Joy is not the same as natural effervescence; joy is the paradoxical fruit of inner freedom and deep engagement, by which I become truly myself.

Steps

It is no accident that words like joy, happiness and rejoicing are found in the various communications from Pope Francis. His very first letter, a kind of broad policy statement, was called simply "The Joy of the Gospel." "The Joy of Love" set out his reflections after the synod on the Family. The Holy Father also published a letter called "Rejoice and be glad" – Gaudete et exultate – on the pursuit of holiness in the world of today.

You could be forgiven for thinking that in today's world and even more in today's church that "joy" is extra to requirements, the honours course, so to speak, while the rest of us get on with the daily grind. Nothing could be further from the truth. Being joyful is a built-in part of believing. The fact that it is a challenge for us today is simply a sign that we need the challenge. Prophetic figures always help us to think beyond the immediate current situation and access dimensions of life hidden by the everyday and concealed by conventional thinking.

Joy really is the fruit of an encounter, followed by a paradoxical combination of deep engagement and inner freedom. The encounter was memorably described by Pope Francis when he wrote in "The Joy of the Gospel,"

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord".

That encounter is really the discovery of God's project for humanity, a project of love, proclaimed by Jesus in word and deed and by his destiny. Nothing could be more thrilling. The great events that bring us new life in Christ started with his birth, which we celebrate in two weeks time and Advent is our time of preparation.

Finally, the words of St Paul are addressed to each one of us today: Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. If someone were to say to me, where would you find the best teaching on joy in the New Testament, I would unhesitatingly answer, in Paul's letters and in the Gospels by Luke and by John. It is not an accident that all three also share a teaching on prayer and on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, prayer and joy all belong together, as the foundation of freedom, engagement and personal fulfilment.

Conclusion

None of this means that life is not difficult or that discipleship is not costly, as we can see in today's preaching of John the Baptist. On the contrary! But, because we are fully engaged, because (paradoxically) we are fully free in our commitment, a quiet joy is released in each one of us. It is the joy of being fully ourselves – in ourselves, before others and above all in the presence of God. Perhaps now more than ever we should permit ourselves to feel the energy and vitality that are part of the Good News.