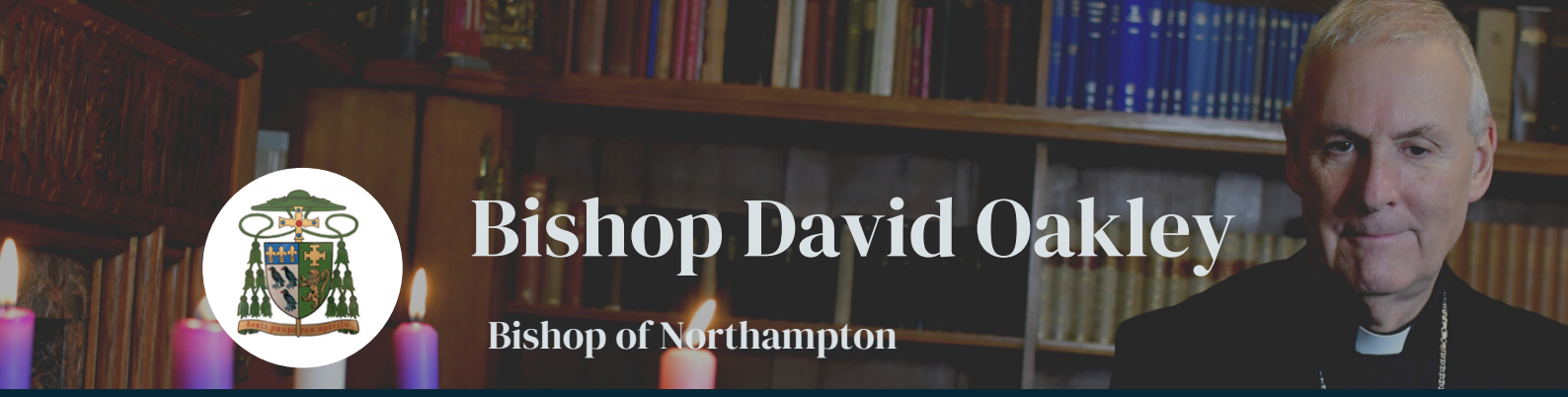

Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton

Letter for the Third Sunday of Advent 2023

December 17, 2023

To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In this third week of advent, you will notice that the colour of the candle is different to the usual purple. It is a rose coloured candle symbolising Gaudete Sunday. ‘Gaudete, Christus est natus’, ‘Rejoice! that Christ is born’.

Joy is a gift from God, we recognise that. We are mindful of the many times we have tried to manufacture joy. But the Prophet Isaiah gives us a picture of joy when he speaks of what the Lord will do, how the Lord will bring new life to the wasteland.

They will come to Zion, shouting for joy, everlasting joy on their faces. Joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended.

It is important that we appreciate that this is a gift from the Lord, and it is in response to what God has done. How often we find ourselves looking quite sorry for ourselves even in church. No wonder our Holy Father invites us not to look like sourpusses. We can be easily distracted from the heart of the Kerygma, the Gospel that God who created us and took compassion upon us when we were fallen into sin, has sent a Saviour and that Saviour has come with a promise of the spirit to those who are open to receiving the gifts of God. That is a great message of joy.

I always remember hearing where the word Kerygma came from. Apparently, a slave would be chosen by a general, to return to Rome with the message in his hand that the battle had been won. He did so gladly and rejoicing because he knew that once the message was delivered the emperor would grant him his freedom.

Maybe we need to see joy in those terms. Our joy is given to us when we appreciate what we have received from the Lord and nothing can take away from that experience of joy. So we have thought about hope and we have thought about peace, and in so many ways this week in thinking about joy, we are reminding ourselves that God's work is fruitful and that we can indeed rejoice.

Sincerely,

Bishop David Oakley
Bishop of Northampton