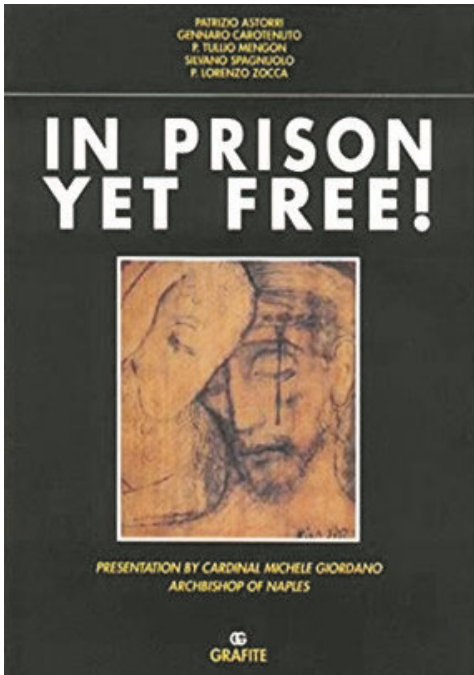


## FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“Gaudete” comes from the Latin, meaning “Rejoice.”

Joy is unbidden, it is a visceral emotion that comes from the soul. But joy can disappear as quickly as it arrives. We can be on top of the world one moment and down in the doldrums the next.

This is the experience of John the Baptist. It is our experience.

John had rejoiced to think the Messiah had arrived - he recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God, and even sent his own disciples to follow Jesus.

But now John is having second thoughts, he's second guessing himself. In prison, he has probably been listening to others, who have sowed seeds of doubt in him.

John's disciples visited him in prison, and infected him with what they had been secretly thinking, suggesting that Jesus could not be all they had hoped for, given John's current situation. If Jesus really was the Messiah, if he was the one to put things right, how come John was in prison?

Rather than go down the rabbit hole of speculations and conjecture, rumors and imaginings, John the Baptist decides to ask Jesus up front. He cannot go to Jesus himself, so he sends two of his disciples. These two are probably Andrew and the John - the first two disciples who had left the Baptist to follow Jesus.

The fact that he sends them to speak to Jesus directly is John the Baptists salvation. He wants to hear it from Jesus himself. He communicates with Jesus: “Are you the one we had hoped for, or should we wait for another?”

How much heartache is avoided by speaking and listening. The usual modus operandi is not to say what you think, to harbor negative thoughts, until the poison suffocates the soul. John doesn't do this, but rather he speaks to Jesus. It's an act of humility on his part, in fact it was probably very humiliating to entrust to someone else - the two disciples - his secret thoughts and doubts. He breaks the seal of the confessional. He brings all to the light. What comes to the light becomes light.

Jesus answers him, and us, by saying ‘you are very much mistaken.’ The root of doubt and depression lies in your idolatry. You have a false idea of how the Messiah, how God, should be. You want God to wave a magic wand and fix everything, to take away all sufferings and problems.

But Jesus, as the Lamb of God, has already faced this temptation, and answered it. He will answer it with the Cross. He tells John the Baptist that he too can experience joy even in the dungeon of his prison cell.

But this can only be experienced by those ‘who do not take offense at me,’ i.e., are not scandalized by me. The Cross in our life today, is either the stone rejected by us, the builders, or it becomes the corner stone. John the Baptist believes Jesus, and his doubts are replaced by joy. He is in prison, yet free! (This is the title of a book, pictured here, written by my first Catechist, Fr. Carmelo DiGiovanni, who ministered to the prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs, London.) The joy John experienced is offered to us in the Liturgy today.

Fr. Sean