

Third Sunday of Advent C - We are called to be joyful as we await the coming of the Lord.
December 12, 2021

The Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally known as Gaudete Sunday. “**Gaudete,**” when translated from Latin, means “rejoice”. Despite the otherwise somber readings of the season of Advent, which has as a secondary theme the need for penitence, the readings on the third Sunday emphasize the joyous anticipation of the Lord's coming. In his 2014 Gaudete Sunday homily, Pope Francis said **that Gaudete Sunday is known as the "Sunday of joy"**, and that instead of fretting about "all they still haven't" done to prepare for Christmas, people should **"think of all the good things life has given you."** Also the colour of vestments for this Sunday is rose and the third candle of Advent Wreath is pink (called the “Shepherd's Candle”) because pink/rose is a liturgical colour for joy.

In this Sunday's first reading (3:14-18) through Zephaniah, God calls us to **“Rejoice and exult with all our heart.”** Isaiah reminds us how God has delivered us, is delivering us, and will deliver us. He invites us to shout aloud and sing for joy because we shall **“draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.”** The prophets looked forward to the day of the Lord's coming as a time of great joy. While Isaiah speaks of doom and gloom, he does look forward to the Lord's coming as a time for shouting joyfully, **“ Surely God is my salvation.” It is a day of great rejoicing when the people would drink their fill of salvation like someone drawing fresh water from a well.**

And our cheerleader, St. Paul, in the second reading (Philippines 4:4-7), strongly urges us to **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”** It is believed that the Apostle Paul was under house arrest when he wrote the words we heard from his letter to the Philippians. And still, Paul could say, “Rejoice!” One might wonder what he had to rejoice about in that situation. Well, Paul rejoiced because he looked forward to the Lord's coming, but he also rejoiced because the Lord is always near. **Paul carried the joy of Advent with him wherever he went, even in a Roman jail.**

Yes, Advent is a season for waiting, but it is also a time of preparation, a time of looking for the coming of the Lord, for the fulfillment of God's promised restoration, for the peace that overcomes all violence, and **for that perfect love that casts out fear.** We have been experiencing tough times these last two years, especially the COVID-19 pandemic. With the suffering, loss, uncertainty, and state of our beautiful and broken world, how can we hear these words and rejoice? In our minds, joy tends to overlap with happiness which is often connected with what is happening to us and around us. Happiness usually lasts for a short period of time: birthdays celebration, holidays, festivals, winning a lottery, etc. But as **Saint Augustine said, “True happiness is to rejoice in the truth, for to rejoice in the truth is to rejoice in You, O God, who are the truth...** Those who think that there is another kind of happiness look for joy elsewhere, but theirs is not true joy.” And **Saint John of the Cross echoed, “The soul of the one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, and is always in the mood for singing.”** So true joy, unlike happiness, lasts forever no matter what the challenges are. **Christian joy does not come from the absence of sorrow, pain or trouble but from an awareness of Christ's presence in our souls.**

In the ancient world when a king decided to tour his kingdom, he first sent his courier ahead to prepare the way. In the Gospel reading (Luke 3:10-18), John the Baptist is the courier and great herald of the Messiah King, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah had long ago prophesied the role of the Forerunner of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3-5). John undoubtedly took this word to heart. He began his public ministry preaching a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of

sins" (Luke 3:3), preaching that the messiah is coming and that the people should clear a spiritual road for the Lord to come into their lives. He is also remembered by the Church as the patron saint of spiritual joy. Perhaps he earned that title since, earlier in Luke's gospel, when Elizabeth voiced how the baby in her womb leaped for joy at the presence of Mary and Jesus. **It was John's great joy to always be pointing to Jesus. Today, it is our great joy to be waiting for the coming of Jesus.**

John was sent into difficult, complicated times, times like we are experiencing. And his message was simple: repent; turn your lives around; turn back to God. For John, repentance was not about beating ourselves up for things done or left undone; **to repent meant total transformation that commits ourselves to God's way that leads to peace.** He told them don't simply rely on their ancestry, tradition, or history. This is about preparing themselves for the One who is to come. **When John finished preaching, they asked "How do we repent?" "What should we do?" John didn't ask the people to change the world, but rather to change themselves.** He told the crowds to consider sharing what they have with the cold and hungry. He told the tax collectors to be honest and fair, the soldiers to act with integrity, avoiding abuse of their power. **"Go home," John told them. Go home to your families, your neighbours, your vocations, your friends. Go home and live your lives as deeply and as generously as you can right now. Do what the Lord requires of you and do it now. Be generous, be merciful and do justice now.**

What does this all mean for us? **"What should we do?"** As we wait and as we look forward to the coming of the Messiah, are we engaging in the kind of deep self-reflection that leads to action? Or have we fallen into complacency? Are we gathering like the crowds in John's story, moving toward genuine repentance? Or are we turning away? **In our baptisms, we are marked as Christ's own forever, and it is the meaning of this mark that John called his followers to embrace – and is calling us to embrace. Through baptism, we are cleansed and renewed with water from the springs of salvation before being sent out to serve. We might think that focusing our attention on what we long for but do not yet have might be a cause for discouragement rather than joy.** But, perhaps, it is that very act of watching and waiting and looking for the coming of God that inspires great joy. The Gospel writer calls John's exhortation "good news." And it is, especially if we believe that we are not worthy of God's saving grace. Nothing in our lives is beyond redemption. Knowing and accepting this is reason enough for rejoicing. This is not easy. That's why it takes intentional preparation and repentance – which means amending our lives, turning toward God and letting the light of Christ shine forth from us. **That is what we must do to prepare in this holy season. Advent is beckoning us to do just that, and it encourages us with a promise, the promise of the coming embrace of Christ and the gift of abundant life that he brings.**

On this Gaudete Sunday, we are all called to rejoice. The coming of the Messiah and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the Good News the angel will speak of when appearing to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." This brings us hope even amid our struggles so that when the Christ child arrives at the manger, we can rejoice with joy singing, "Joy to the world! The Lord is come Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room." But, brothers and sisters, for now, let's pray, "Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us." Amen.