

THIRD ADVENT - C

As I'm sure you all remember, this Third Sunday of Advent is known as "Gaudete Sunday."

The word "Gaudete" is Latin for "rejoice."

We light the rose candle on the Advent wreath and the priest wears rose vestments as a sign of this rejoicing.

St. Paul urges us with great enthusiasm: "Rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again: Rejoice!"

The prophet Zephaniah also calls the people to rejoice: "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart ..."

What is the cause for all of this rejoicing?

"The Lord is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear."

St. Paul echoes these words and proclaims their fulfillment in Christ: "The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all ..."

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, renewed this call to rejoice in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel," when he wrote:

"The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew."

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What a beautiful and powerful statement of faith.

Yes, there is still sin, sorrow, feelings of emptiness, and the experience of loneliness, but our faith in the presence of the Lord in our midst brings an inner joy that no one or nothing can take away from us.

Believing in Jesus gives us the strength to bear our burdens trusting that he is Emmanuel ... God-with-us.

13 years ago I celebrated the Masses of this Third Sunday of Advent just a few days after my mother's death.

I remember sharing in my homily my conflicted feelings about this Sunday's call to rejoice.

However, believing firmly that my Mom was with the Lord where there is no more sickness, pain, or sorrow, I was able to rejoice.

As we continue to make our way through the Covid pandemic, as individuals and families deal with economic stress, health issues, and the death of loved ones ...

Christian joy is the Holy Spirit's gift to those who hold on to Jesus in faith, hope, and love - even in the midst of great sorrow.

This Sunday's Gospel presents us once again with the figure of John the Baptist.

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As John proclaims the coming of the Messiah and the call to repentance, those in the crowd ask him: "What must we do?"

His answers are both simple yet profound.

- Share your extra coat with the person with no coat.
- Share your food with the person who is hungry.
- Be honest in your dealings with others.
- Practice justice and integrity.

That's what St. Paul means when he writes: "Your kindness should be known to all."

Just as the Scriptures encourage us to find our joy in the Lord, so we are called to be a source of joy in the lives of others.

Our parishioners have once again accepted this invitation to be a source of joy and comfort to others through the many presents that have been given for the Angel tree, the abundance of food that has been donated for the food pantry, and by your various monetary gifts.

On behalf of the many people who will be helped through your generosity I want to say "Thank you!"