

Homily  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent B  
December 11, 2011

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday in Advent – it is by tradition known as Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” is Latin for “REJOICE.” It is a day where we are all called upon to REJOICE at the coming of the Lord! You will notice that at this point of this Advent season the vestments are a lighter color and the rose colored candle on the Advent wreath is now lighted as we continue our Advent journey to the light, to the joy, that is Jesus Christ.

Rejoice as defined by the Webster dictionary is to feel very happy or show great happiness about something. And Advent is defined as the arrival of something important or awaited.

The spirit of this Advent season is captured in the second reading from St. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians where Paul exhorts us to “Rejoice always.” And we hear Isaiah in the first reading when he writes “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.” And Mary on hearing that she is to become the mother of Christ proclaims “my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”

Advent is a time of hope for the joy that is proclaimed in these readings. Isaiah, Paul, and Mary all rejoicing in the Lord and calling each of us to the joy that comes from knowing that we are deeply loved by God. Isaiah has a deep hope for justice among the nations because he has experienced the compassion and love that God has for each of us.

Mary knew God was with her. She knew she was loved, and in this she found courage and safety. She could handle anything and everything always in hope; never complaining, just pondering and trusting deep in her heart when things went wrong. Mary’s Spirit was able to rejoice in God, and God’s wants this same joy to be yours and mine so that we too can say to ourselves, and all that we meet on life’s journey: “My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.”

Paul’s hope is that we rejoice always and pray without ceasing, and give thanks to God in all circumstances; for this is the will of Christ Jesus for each of us.

Interestingly it is said that among the most neglected of our Christian obligations is the obligation to rejoice. Just as the word of God commands us to believe and to love, so does it command us to rejoice.

Today as we hear the Scriptures telling us to rejoice, we may well find ourselves saying, “What have we got to rejoice about? The answer to that question is extremely important because it is what this Advent Season is all about.

It is the message that we have a God who deeply loves each and every one of us. The realities of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter have shown us this. We have a God who will deliver us. Advent and Christmas celebrate the fact that God has even taken on our human flesh and become one of us. He is here among us. This is the great message of our faith and it is good news.

The command to rejoice, like every other command is demanding. It becomes all the harder as life unfolds around us day in and day out. We most likely know someone who can't find a job. Likely we know someone who has lost their home. Someone we work with has just been told she has cancer. We have family members or friends who have been at war for too long. A neighbor's husband has died and this will be her first Christmas without him. Our kids don't go to church. The list goes on and on doesn't it?

Each situation has a human face – perhaps one that we know well. We breathe, and live, and cry, and feel deeply about all the events that are happening in our lives and those of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes we feel so powerless in the face of it all.

We have the opportunity every day to make a difference for so many people, by a kind word, a smile, a phone call, a donation, and especially through our prayers.

What do we have to rejoice about? We rejoice in our faith. Just as we proclaim the mystery of faith: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We know that when Christ does come again he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

We know that life is not always rosy, but life after death is heaven. Our hope is not in this life only. That is why we are able to rejoice in the good and in the bad – just as Jesus did.

We rejoice because we believe John the Baptist's voice crying in the wilderness telling us to prepare the way of the Lord by setting our lives straight so that God can enter.

Without God's love and God's presence in our lives this is only a useless wish. But with God at our side, and in our heart, willing it for us, it can become our reality, our way, if we accept God's love and comfort into our hearts.