

Homily Notes for Sunday Dec 17, 2017, 3rd Advent B

Readings: Is 61:1-2, 10-11, I Thess 5:16-24, Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

1. Introduction: Today is “*Gaudete Sunday*” because today’s Mass in its Latin version began with the opening antiphon: “*Gaudete in Domino semper*”—“**Rejoice** in the Lord always.” During Advent the celebrant of the liturgy wears vestments with the penitential color of purple or violet. In order to remind the people that they were preparing for the very joyful occasion of the birth of Jesus, on this third Sunday of Advent, the celebrant wore “rose” vestments. Today we light the rose candle and the priest wears rose vestments to express our **joy** in the coming of Jesus, our savior.

Note that John the Baptist is different from John the Apostle. John the Baptist was killed by Herod early on during the ministry of Jesus. John the Apostle lived longest of all the Apostles, writing his Gospel in the period 80 – 90 A.D.

2. First Reading: The Jewish people were full of joy for they were returning to their homeland after 70 years of exile. They were completely unable to free themselves but Cyrus, the Persian king, was merciful and let peoples return to their ancestral homeland. The prophet says that God has *anointed him with the Spirit and sent him to bring good news*. This consists of bringing **good news** to the poor, the healing of the broken-hearted and the liberation of prisoners and the announcing of a year of favor from the Lord.

Then the prophet expresses Israel's **joy** at the coming of God's salvation, using various images, that of wearing exceptionally beautiful clothes, as a bride and groom do at the wedding; that of the earth's bringing forth new vegetation in the spring. He says, “*I rejoice heartily in the Lord; in my God is the joy of my soul.*”

This passage was seen as a Messianic prophecy which found its fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Inaugurating his public ministry in Nazareth, Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of this passage from Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21).

3. Responsorial Psalm: records Mary’s **rejoicing** because she would be the mother of the Savior.

4. Second Reading: Paul is encouraging them to joy, with instruction and guidance, because Jesus was active in their salvation. He also given them practical coaching, as part of God’s team, on how to achieve the goal. The reading contains practical suggestions for anyone trying to be a follower of God: “*Do not stifle the spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test everything; retain what is good. Avoid any semblance of evil.*” He also commands us to “*rejoice always and pray without ceasing.*” Note that this is a command not a suggestion. We can control our emotions.

5. The Gospel: John the Baptist’s announcement: Be prepared and rejoice for your Savior is at hand. The evangelist John presents John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3, “a voice *in the desert*” calling for Israelites to prepare a way for the coming of Jesus. The Baptizer declares: “*I am baptizing only with water; but there is One among you—you don’t recognize him—and I am not worthy to untie the straps of his shoes.*”

6. The Question of the Moment: “Do we feel we need to be saved?”

There are clearly some people who need to be saved and cannot do it themselves; trapped in the rubble of an earthquake or drowning in a lake. If they are not rescued in time they will surely die.

7. And what makes us really rejoice? In Texas, end of football game, almost lost but “miraculous” catch in end zone. How does the player respond? How does the crowd respond?

8. But in terms of eternal salvation, do we need a Savior as badly as a Texas High School football team needs a touchdown? First, do we today even believe in life after death? Is the question of salvation at the end of our lives even believed? Even with the multiple near-death experiences we have had documented in our lifetimes. So, the first question is, do the promises of God really exist?

Ex. Dain Finney – on campus at U of Kansas, people really didn’t want to have any conversation about faith and salvation. Why might that be?

9. Contemporary situation: In our society where we are basically prosperous, we have the necessary food and clothes, opportunity for jobs, medical care, cars, transportation and cheaper gas. Why do we need God?

Do you know where heaven is? Do you know how to get there?

10. It is our sins that will condemn us before God, but it is also sin and evil in our lives that makes us unhappy, that leads to conflicts and fighting, that destroys peace within families and communities. It is sin and the active presence of evil that provokes injustice, violence and death. Think of all the demonstrations going on in these days because of perceived racism and prejudice.

11. And ourselves, personally, are we able to overcome our weaknesses and our sins, by ourselves? What about our resolutions? How long do they last before we give up? And dieting, weight loss, and exercise? How attractive is food? Is it not true that we need help, both for the issues in this life and in our battle with sin and evil for eternal life?

12. Danger of powerful, external evil threat. Example of beautiful evening at home with family while on has heard the news of the beheading of four little Christian children by Isis in Iraq. Do we recognize what a great gift we have in this country, which is fundamentally guided by the basics of our faith and God's righteousness.

13. Our participation in the Eucharist should be itself an expression of our joy and thanksgiving. "Eucharist" in Greek means "thanksgiving". This is true because if we are growing in Christ, if we are being redeemed, if our lives are changing according to the commandments of God, we will have many blessings in our lives.

14. For example in the language of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and Communion. In the words of "Institution" we recognize the bread and the wine as the elements which truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus in his very crucifixion ("This is my body which will be given up for you."). We then commit ourselves to him as disciples "May he make of us an everlasting gift to you and enable us to share in the inheritance of your saints". We pray for the living and the dead, for their salvation.

15. In the Communion Rite: In response to the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us Lord from *every* evil and grant us *peace in our day.*" We ask that the Lord would not look upon our sins but upon the faith of His Church. We ask him to grant us the peace and unity of His Kingdom. Is it possible to have these values if we have not been cleansed of our sins? Then we offer each other "the sign of peace". Do we take this as a recommitment of ourselves personal to peace and the things that promote peace? Then again, "Lamb of God, you take away *the sins* of the world." And finally, "This is the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. *Happy are those who are called to his supper.*"

This is why we rejoice in the middle of Advent, in the middle of this penitential season, as we are preparing for the coming of Christ into the world.

16. What should we do in preparation for Christmas (the coming of Jesus)? John's answer to this question was: "Repent and reform your lives, and prayerfully wait for the Messiah." Our Blessed Mother, in her many apparitions, has urgently reminded us of the need for more fervent prayer and more complete repentance. The Holy Mass, regular monthly Confession, Bible reading, the Rosary, Adoration and fasting. Finally, let us share our love with others in selfless and humble service, "doing small things but with great love" (Mother Teresa). To live like this brings **joy** to us and to all around us.

17. We need to bear witness to Christ the light: By baptism we become members of the family of Christ, the true Light of the world. Jesus said: "*You are the light of the world.*" Hence our mission as brothers and sisters of Christ and members of his church is to reflect Christ's light to others just as the moon reflects the light of the sun. Many people are waiting for us to reflect the light of Christ and to turn their lives into experiences of **joy**, wholeness and integrity. The **joy** of Jesus, the joy of Christmas, can only be ours if we work with Jesus to bring **joy** into the lives of others. Let us remember that Christmas is not complete unless we show generosity to those who have nothing to give us in return.

18. What is the one thing out of this Mass that will help you become the best-version-of-yourself?

JOKE OF THE WEEK FOR "GAUDETE SUNDAY"

1) Last minute preparation: A priest waited in line to have his car filled with gas just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump. 'Reverend,' said the young man, 'I'm so sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip.' The minister chuckled, 'I know what you mean... It's the same in my business.'

2) Advent penance: Paddy was driving down the street in a sweat because he had an important meeting and could not find a parking place. Looking up to heaven he said, "Lord, take pity on me. If you find me a parking place I will go to Mass every Sunday for the rest of my life and give up my Irish whiskey during Advent and Lent. Miraculously a parking place appeared. Paddy looked up again and said, "Never mind, I found one."

Stories: Rejoicing worshippers: There is a story told about a man from Louisville, Kentucky, who had to travel to St. Louis on business. This was years ago when Christians kept Sunday as a very special day. For this man, "keeping the Sabbath" also meant not riding the trains on Sunday. Thus, after he finished up his business late Saturday night, he had to stay over in St. Louis until the following Monday morning. On Sunday morning, he left the hotel looking for a place to worship. The streets were quite deserted, but finally he saw a policeman and asked him for directions to the nearest church. The stranger thanked the policeman for the information and was about to walk off when he turned and asked the policeman: "Why have you recommended that particular church? It looks like a Catholic church. There must be several churches nearby that you could have recommended." The policeman smiled and replied: "I'm not a church man myself, but the people who come out of that church are the happiest looking church-people in St. Louis and they claim that they have received Jesus and they are happily taking him to their homes. I thought that would be the kind of church you would like to attend." The Scripture for today reminds us that every Sunday in every Christian church must be a "Gaudete Sunday or "Rejoice Sunday."