

## **December 17, 2017**

Isa 61:1-2a,10-12; 1 Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

There are different feelings of happiness and joy. We all know the joy of starting a new thing, beginning something that will lead to something awesome. There is the joy and excitement we feel right as it is happening - like the joy and excitement of walking into a new school year, a new job, a new relationship, a new trip, or the joy and excitement of a child's Christmas morning. But there is that other sort of joy and excitement that is less powerful and comes when we realize that this awesome thing is coming - it's not there yet, but we just have a wave of excitement run through us as we anticipate what it will be like when it is there. That is the feeling the Church invites us to let run through us this Sunday: The joy and held-back excitement of knowing this great thing is just around the corner. To symbolize this we switch for a day from the violet color of waiting and repentance to the pink of joy - not the white and gold joy of Christmas, but the held-back joy of a wave of excitement for the thing to come.

In the Gospel we hear again about John the Baptist. We are told that: *He came ... to testify to the light, so that all might believe ... . He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.* The people had been waiting for God to come to them in power and here was John testifying that the coming of the light was just around the corner. He reminds them of the continuing need for a savior, he quotes Isaiah and stays that he *is the voice of one crying out in the desert* - he is the message that they had been waiting for. Imagine the rush of subdued joy that went through the people who believed, the same joy that the Church invites us to share in. There is an awesome thing coming and it is just around the corner.

But what is coming? What does this coming mean to us today? What is coming to us this Christmas? What can we be joyful about today? In his later ministry, Jesus will quote our first reading today - it is basically his mission statement: *The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, ...; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor; to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.* The presence of Jesus is God's personal intervention into the lives of humans for their benefit. Jesus brings gladness, healing, freedom, and the destruction of death through the salvation he brings. So we can look forward to the possibilities of our being given gladness amid the poverty of our lives, we can look forward to healing and

freedom from the worries and addictions and other things in life that make us their prisoner. We can look forward to the security that we gain by knowing we have received the favor of God. We can look forward to the possibilities of an eternal life of happiness with God. Why? Because God will be born in the flesh and then take that flesh to the cross for us. This whole series of events that we celebrate open possibilities for us every day.

Our prayer for ourselves and for each other should be one of being prepared for Jesus' coming to us - in whatever way he chooses to come to us. If we are open, he will come - it may be different than we expect - but it will be a way that is part of a greater plan than we can imagine. When will we allow Jesus to be born in our hearts as surely as he was at Bethlehem - and in a way that he wants to be born? We are always able to turn in prayer to Jesus, to receive him worthily in the Eucharist, to invite the coming that will bring us joy. St. Paul's prayer for his friends in the second reading is a model for the one we can offer for ourselves and those we care about: *May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Our preparation and our faith in the power of Jesus to fulfill the mission statement we hear today - this allows us to approach Jesus ready to be healed, freed, and gladdened. We should look to be able to experience that held-back joy of knowing that he can come powerfully in our lives as he did when he healed and preached in biblical times. Something awesome is coming, or as Paul said to us today: *The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.*

Let's be honest - we sometimes don't let ourselves feel joy unless we get it our way. Maybe we could pray to prepare to receive the Lord as he wishes to come into our lives. Maybe we could pray for him to heal, to free, to gladden, not as we want alone, but as he would do (with Jesus taking into account situations years from now that we don't know about). With that level of trust and faith we can have that little wave of held-back joy that we have been talking about. The fact that we don't exactly know how he might come only adds to the excitement. Resting in faith in the love of God we can wait with expectation for Jesus' coming - and have the wave of held-back joy that comes from realizing that Jesus will fulfill his mission even if it does not look like it all the time; that Jesus will use us in that mission even if we are as imperfect as we are. The joy of today helps us to open our eyes for the coming of Jesus into our lives so that one day we can say with the prophet: *I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice.*