

Sunday of Joy



By Wise Will

Gaudete Sunday (/ɡɑʊ'dɛtɛ/ *gow-DET-eh*) is the third Sunday of Advent in the liturgical calendar of the Western Church, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, Lutheran Churches, and other mainline Protestant churches. It can fall on any date from 11 December to 17 December. This year, it is on the 13th.

The day takes its common name from the Latin word *Gaudete* (“Rejoice”), the first word of the introit of this day’s Mass.

The season of Advent originated as a fast of 40 days in preparation for Christmas, commencing on the day after the feast of Saint Martin (11 November), whence it was often called Saint Martin’s Lent, a name by which it was known as early as the fifth century. In the ninth century, the

duration of Advent was reduced to four weeks (a period starting four Sundays before Christmas), and Advent preserved most of the characteristics of a penitential season, which made it a kind of counterpart to Lent. Gaudete Sunday is a counterpart to Laetare Sunday, and provides a similar break about midway through a season which is otherwise of a penitential character, and signifies the nearness of the Lord's coming.

The spirit of the liturgy throughout Advent is one of expectation and preparation for the feast of Christmas as well as for the second coming of Christ, and the penitential exercises suitable to that spirit are thus on Gaudete Sunday suspended, as it were, for a while, in order to symbolize that joy and gladness in the promised Redemption.

While the theme of Advent is a focus on the coming of Jesus in three ways: his first, his present, and his final Advent, the readings for Gaudete Sunday deal with rejoicing in the Lord – Christian joy – as well as the mission of John the Baptist and his connection with Advent. The theologian Henri Nouwen described the difference between joy and happiness. While happiness is dependent on external conditions, joy is “the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death – can take that love away.” Thus joy can be present even in the midst of sadness.

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.”