Shout for JOY! Rejoice! This is what we hear today in our readings…and actually, it is a bit of a command. Why? Because the LORD, our God is in our midst (Zephaniah 3:17), the great and Holy One of Israel is among us (Isaiah 12:6)

- My friends, this truth, this joy of God’s presence among us, there is no time or place we proclaim it more powerfully than when we gather together to celebrate Mass
- Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent, also known as Gaudete Sunday – Gaudete means rejoice! We can feel it, we can see it the faces of children; yes, the anticipation and excitement about Christmas is growing, but there is even more to our celebration than this
  - Throughout Advent we have been preparing and continue to prepare with joy to receive Christ at His coming: at Christmas, into our lives right now, and when he comes again to bring His Kingdom to fulfillment

This emphasis on joy and the presence of God – the coming of Christ into our midst – provides a very fitting opportunity for us to continue our Year of the Eucharist and St. Joseph preaching series on the Mass with our focus today being on the Real Presence and Reception of Christ in the Eucharist

- Our God is a God who is faithful to His promises! He has promised to be with us always, and “as Christians we know that we need Christ to be present in our lives. He is our very sustenance as he reminded us: unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you (Jn 6:53)” (The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, USCCB, 4)

The truth of Christ’ Real Presence in the Eucharist is precisely what the priest is proclaiming at Mass as he raises the consecrated bread and wine saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him…”

- Jesus Christ is truly present – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – under the forms of bread and wine. It is not “ordinary bread and ordinary drink” that we receive in the Eucharist, but the flesh and blood of Christ, who came to nourish and transform us, to restore our relationship to God and to one another (Mystery of the Eucharist, USCCB, 18)

We respond in faith directly to Christ, affirming our belief that He miraculously gives us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. In the words of the centurion, we declare: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive YOU…” In the very presence of Christ, we admit our sinfulness, our desperate need for Him – we cannot make it on our own

- Pope Francis reminds us that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak”
  - This is why a mere remembering of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection would never be enough; we need to encounter Him offering Himself to us and to truly receive Him present in the Eucharist through which He cleanses us of sin, strengthens us, opens our eyes to His presence in the poor, unites us to Himself and one another, and gives us a share in the very life of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1391-1398)

Now, we move in procession together as a Church to encounter and receive Christ. This action is a prayer, for we outwardly express our inward desire to be united to Christ and to one another

- As the minister raises the host/chalice for each person, the minister professes faith in the Real Presence saying, “Body of Christ/Blood of Christ;” we bow our head in reverence to Christ and respond in faith: Amen.
  - One may receive in the hand or on the tongue; this is always to be done with the utmost reverence, for “receiving the Eucharist means adoring Him whom we receive” (Sacramentum Caritatis, 66)
    - Our Amen has a twofold meaning: 1) it is our assent of faith in Christ’s Eucharistic presence; and 2) it is our promise to become more like Christ and allow Him to live in us more fully (Augustine: “become what you celebrate;” Pope Leo I: “you are what you eat”)
  - Saint John Paul II reminds us that in our reception of the Eucharist, not only do we receive Christ in His fullness, but He also receives each of us, for we become a part of Him (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 22); authentic communion with Christ, therefore, can never be private, as it desires communion with all
  - The One we receive in the Eucharist – Jesus Christ – holds nothing back; he draws us into the very heart of God, offering us the fullness of His tender love and the power to heal all of our wounds

The LORD, our God is near, he is in our midst. Let us receive Christ with joy, for He comes to save us!