

*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent- EF*  
*Philippians 4: 4-7, John 1:19-28*  
*Dcn. Pat Hall*

Gaudete in Domino semper: Rejoice in the Lord always.

This is how Paul greeted us today in our Epistle. This 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent is a day to rejoice in our hope and anticipation of the coming of our Lord and Savior.

During Advent we hear John the Baptist making straight the way of the Lord. The Gospel says the same to us as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Nativity,... as we prepare for Jesus' second coming... and as we open our hearts to God's indwelling.

John's cry in the wilderness had become well known to even those from as far as Jerusalem which was some distance from the Jordan where John was "*proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" (Mk 1:4)

The priests, Levites and Pharisees came to him, some maybe hopeful that he was the Messiah or the one ushering in the Messianic age. Some might have been fearful that he might not be the Messiah, but claim a Messiah's following. In the end, John confessed he was not the awaited for Christ. But John pointed to the one "*whose shoe [he was] not worthy to loose... [the one who] "hath stood... in the midst of you, whom you know not."*

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At the Annunciation and his Nativity, Jesus came to be in the *midst* of us. His coming was in such humility that many missed the birth of the King of Kings. It was through his death and resurrection that his people were finally able, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to see Jesus as he truly is, the one who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

In Advent we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus" and yet our savior is always in our midst as he promised to be with us always. (Mt 28:20)

Our liturgy reminds us of Jesus' presence. We find Christ present in our presiding priest, in the proclamation of the Word, in Holy Communion and in the participating faithful. And yet it is often hard to feel his presence. Why is it so hard to experience his presence in our midst when everything around us shouts it?

One answer is forgiveness...or more accurately the lack of forgiveness. We wallow in the guilt of wrongs we've done. We steam and hiss with the bitterness of wrongs done to us, wrongs we did not deserve. And, even in it's absurdity, often a mixture of both.

How can I see Christ in the person next to me if I have to avert my eyes in shame of my wrongs? How can I see Christ in the person next to me if I harbor resentment and anger towards them? May we start with acknowledging that it is our common experience that we commit wrongs... and are victimized by wrongs committed by others? Forgiveness transforms that common human experience into something divine, something where we will be able to see Jesus in our midst.

There is a related passage from Fr. Ronald Rolheiser that I periodically share with my family:

*We are called to community, to stay with each other. This, despite romantic dreams about friendship, marriage, and community, is singularly the most difficult task that there is. We cannot ever be close to anyone for long without seriously hurting that person and that person seriously hurting us. Hence community depends upon us having the resilience to forgive, forget, bounce back, and live in some joy and happiness despite having been hurt and wounded."*<sup>i</sup>

I have hurt people I care about...recently. And yet the past couple of times I've crossed paths with a person I hurt, I was treated with grace and joy. My need to apologize is gaining on my shame and so I intend on tendering my apology soon. But, that other person didn't wait for that apology before treating me with kindness. It's like they care for my welfare. Jesus can be clearly seen in that person's midst.

Maybe that's the point of Jesus' instruction that if you "*recall that your brother has anything against you [to] leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother.*" (Mt 5: 23-24)

Fear is closely associated with anger and obscures our ability to see Jesus. In Newtown, Connecticut there are people taking down their Christmas decorations in grief over the senseless slaughter there.<sup>ii</sup> Everything I've done this past weekend has been haunted by this horror. How are we to see Jesus in our midst?

I received some consolation, some eye opening from our bishop, Paul Bradley. He writes:

*On this weekend, when we are all preparing for the joyful celebration of Gaudete Sunday when the Church directs us all to rejoice because "the Lord is near," our hearts are burdened by the violent and senseless nature of this awful tragedy. And yet, we are still called to "rejoice" not only because "the Lord is near" as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christmas and the coming of the Prince of Peace, but also because our faith assures us that the Lord is present with us, here and now, even in the midst of those enduring unspeakable tragedy. Our Lord is with us who empathize with those who have suffered such loss, and as we each deal with our own fears and anxieties. Our Lord is with us through it all, and gives us the assurance that His Peace will always prevail over senseless violence. And so, we rejoice in knowing that those innocent lives*

*that were taken away from their parents and loved ones are experiencing the fullness of life with our God in Heaven where they are rejoicing eternally.<sup>iii</sup>*

With that hope and consolation, I pray:

Come, Lord Jesus.

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<sup>i</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Against an Infinite Horizon*, pp151-152.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/conn-school-victims-shot-rifle-multiple-times-205207737.html>

<sup>iii</sup> B-mail, December 14, 2012