



Homily for 12/15/2019

Third Sunday of Advent, A

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*Gaudete Sunday*

I love *Gaudete* Sunday. It marks the definitive shift in Advent from our focus on Jesus' Second Coming to the celebration of His First Coming in His birth in that stable in Bethlehem.

To commemorate this shift, the Church sings to us in the Introit: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all, for the Lord is near at hand; have no anxiety about anything, but in all things, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. Lord, you have blessed your land; you have turned away the captivity of Jacob."

Now this Introit blends both the Old and the New Testaments by taking from Psalm 85 and from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. We are also introduced to this blending of the Old and the New Testaments in the readings. First, we hear from Isaiah again, who exhorts us, "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God . . . He comes to save you." And then the prophecy details what this salvation will look like: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing."

In the Gospel, John the Baptist comes up again, but this time, because he has sent his disciples to ask if Jesus is "He-who-is-to-come?" John the Baptist is the last of the Old Testament prophets and is privileged with the task of pointing out God in our midst. As I mentioned last week, he clearly manifested himself as Elijah, thus setting the stage for the saving Messiah to come. But it is curious that the disciples have to ask, "Are you the one?" Jesus, instead of being direct, directs their vision to the fulfillment of the prophecy that they would have known by heart. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them."

Are you the one? Jesus is saying clearly, "Yes. I am God come to save you."

This is the same question that every soul is asking. We are all in need of a savior. We are broken and need a redeemer to right the wrongs of this world, which we can't do by ourselves. This humble disposition, this seeking for God, is the heart of the human plight and it is finally answered in Jesus Christ. That is what we rejoice in every time we celebrate Mass and hear the words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world! The day Isaiah prophesied has come: The desert and parched land of our souls will exult. This hope of salvation from our sinfulness causes us to bear fruit and rejoice with joyful song. This is what the Christian Life is all about – bearing the fruit of joy. All of the invitations to come to Mass, to pray daily, to do good works, to repent from sins, to work on the life of virtue with God's Grace, are all meant to be expressions of rejoicing that God has saved us. Every time a sinner repents it cause great rejoicing in Heaven. Every time we gather and praise and glorify God it rights the wrongs of indifference and blasphemy to our Creator. Every time we love our enemy in Jesus' name, we manifest a kingdom that is not of this fallen earth.

Yet many times we who profess to follow Christ fall back into our former ways. Many times what God has done becomes a sort of "novelty" for us. We are like the crowd in the Gospel that Jesus questions, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" As if to say, "Were you just seeking out some new fad? Was this just another diet, or self-help craze?" Is the work of Evangelization going to be simply a passing fad or will it take root and become deeply engrained in your being and identity? "What did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing?" As if to say, "Don't you know that the pleasures of this world that have captivated you, cannot save you. Earthly powers, wealth and pleasures cannot be your god, and you must be ready to forgo them in order to follow where the prophet is pointing." "Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." But then Jesus adds, that "the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than even he." You who have



been baptized into Jesus Christ, are greater than every person born of woman before Christ. Greater than King Solomon, greater than King David. Greater than Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar or Plato or Socrates. Greater, not because of your own merits or because of some worldly gain, but because you have become a new creature when you clothed yourself with Christ, the God-man. Greater, because you are joined now to the Body of Christ whose head is consubstantial with God the Father. Christian, know your dignity and rejoice!

The exhortation I would like to make to you today is to keep this dignity – and the joy that comes from it – close to you for the next couple of weeks. Do not let the choking round of consumerism and event saturation of this joyous season stifle the true joy that we have precisely because of belonging to Christ! Keep the Advent candles of your homes and your hearts lit. Focus on prayer as the fragrant offering of praise before the face of God. Focus on self-giving rather than thing-giving. I see in our community a great awakening of this reality especially in the very positive response to our Stewardship Appeal. The generosity of those who are active, engaged and invested disciples of Jesus Christ is truly inspiring and life-giving to our parish. Not only have we had pledges that cover our budget, we are seeing people transforming their commitment into belonging. That is priceless. It is a cause for rejoicing. Lastly, in all of this, make time, like the one-out-of-ten cleansed lepers, to return and give thanks, great thanks, Eucharist.

We have often heard the exhortation to “Keep Christ is Christmas”. I always like to go one step further and say, “Keep Mass in ChristMass too!”. Make your plans for Christmas to include the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In all of these ways we will be a light in the darkness for those still seeking. When they ask, “Is Jesus the One-who-is-to-come?” we will be able to say, “Look around, see our joy, see our love for God and for one another,” and they will come to know and to believe!

May Jesus Christ be Praised!