

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – GAUDETE SUNDAY

Isaiah 61: 1-2a; 10-11; 1Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1: 6-8, 19-28

Aloha everyone.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. On this day, commonly referred to as “Joyful” Sunday, Gaudete in Latin, we get to express some of the joy we feel as we get closer to Christmas. We do this for a couple of reasons, but mostly because the Scripture readings for today speak explicitly about “joy”.

In the First Reading we hear Isaiah proclaiming,

**“I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul,” and
“He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.”**

In the Second Reading taken from his First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul tells the small Christian community at Thessalonica and all of us,

**“Rejoice always ... In all circumstances give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

We all want to be happy. And it is natural for us to be happy when life is without trouble. But how can we find true joy in life, a joy that endures and does not forsake us at a time like this.

Are we supposed to be “happy” and “sunny” no matter what? Are we suppose to act as if the pandemic didn’t exist?

Are we supposed to never feel sorrow or pain or sadness for lives lost and those who lost the livelihood due to the COVID-19?

Are we supposed to never show our solidarity with the poor and ignore those who are vulnerable, coping with isolation and loneliness and depression?

Frankly, I find no joy in all of this.

But I must acknowledge that the joy we are called to have does not come from circumstances nor does it depend on one’s feelings or life’s condition. If we put our trust and happiness in the world, we most likely will be disappointed. No, we certainly will be disappointed.

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But if we can experience the joy God gives us, nothing can dampen or take it away.

There is a popular legend in Native American folklore which tells of a tribe whose members had become reckless and warlike. They no longer treated each other or other tribes with respect. The tribe began to fall apart. The elders were obviously very, very concerned. And so one of the chiefs called a meeting of the elders to see what could be done to save the tribe.

The chief felt strongly that the tribe needed to be punished in some way. After much discussion they decided on a punishment for the tribe. They would take away joy from the tribe's members. In fact, they would hide it so that it could never be found again.

One of the leaders suggested that they take joy and carry it to the top of the highest mountain. > One of the elders disagreed. "Someday someone will be able to climb that mountain," he said.

Another elder suggested that they bury it. But others felt that it would eventually be found and dug up.

A third elder thought the best thing to do was to sink it deep in the ocean. But others knew that eventually someone would learn how to dive deep and retrieve it.

Finally, the old chief came up with an ingenious solution. "We will hide joy deep inside the heart of every human person, for they will never think to look for it there."

According to the legend, to this day, human beings have been running and scrambling all over the earth — climbing, digging, diving — searching for something that has already been placed in each of their hearts.

Joy! Joy! Joy! Not somewhere out there. It is right here in the depths of who we are. But we must be careful, because this joy is not something we make or create. It's not something we can take credit for. It is a pure gift from God. In fact, it is the gift of God's own self, a God who comes to us to dwell in our hearts, our souls, our very being.

So, how do we get this joy?

Well, I think that today's Gospel gives us an insight. It's evident that John the Baptist was a pretty popular guy among some of the people. That made him dangerous to authorities and led to his execution.

Yet, it didn't go to his head. No, John knew exactly who he was and who he was not. He knew who he was and who God was. He understood the proper relationship between the two. As John said today,

**“There is one among you whom you do not recognize
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”**

For me, that is one of the principal goals of the spiritual life. This is where we will find true joy, when we stay in proper relationship with our God, a God who created us and wants nothing more than to dwell in us.

Every time we listen to God's Word we open ourselves up to that possibility. Every time we approach this altar to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord it is so that the Lord can dwell in us, transforming us into his Body. When we allow God to dwell in us, we will be channels of His goodness and love. Only then will we be able to truly bring glad tidings to the poor.

Dear friends, Advent is slowly coming to a close. Are we ready? Are we ready to receive the Lord into our hearts, our homes, and our world? Are we ready to open ourselves up to God's transforming love so that we may give birth to Christ in a new way this Advent?

In this time of the pandemic, are we ready to experience the deeper joy we've never had before?

Every Christmas, as we sing “Joy to the World”, may we have the wisdom to find joy in life amid difficult times and stop looking for joy somewhere “out there”. Rather, may we come to know the joy of our God — a God who dwells “right here” in our hearts, and will forever be in us.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: Rejoice!”

(Philippians 4: 4)