

## Homily - Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.  
In all circumstances give thanks,  
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

Saint Paul offers us these beautiful words of encouragement as we enter the final days of Advent, and the light of the Christmas solemnities draws nearer than ever.

But why are we rejoicing?

Why is there this moment of celebration in the middle of this penitential season?

The signs of this liturgy itself, with the distinctive color of rose that represents the violet of Advent penance mixed with the white of Christmas festivity, show us that we are still waiting in tension between these two experiences.

In fact, that’s the exact feeling that St. Paul himself was wrestling with as he wrote to his community in Thessalonica.

This passage, from the fifth chapter of his letter, comes at the conclusion of Paul’s explanation of the Second Coming, or *parousia* - and he challenges the Church to continue to live faithfully as they wait during this time between our Lord’s Incarnation and his return at the end of days.

If you go back through the letter, you’ll notice two distinct themes - first, a reminder to stay vigilant, ready for the Lord’s arrival, and not to neglect their lives of prayer.

And yet, they can’t stand around completely idle, either.

Instead, St. Paul urges them to put their charity into practice.

He writes, “On the subject of mutual charity you have no need for anyone to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another... Nevertheless we urge you, brothers, to progress even more, and to aspire to live a tranquil life, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your [own] hands, as we instructed you...”

That’s the tension at the heart of the Christian life.

Contemplative, but active.

Penitent, yet joyful.

Anticipating, but initiating.

Only in heaven will this tension be fully resolved, but just as the light of Christmas breaks into the penance of this season on this Sunday in particular, the Lord will give us glimpses and moments of that joy and consolation as we continue through our lives.

It’s striking that if you look at the other places where that same Greek verb, *chairete*, “rejoice,” appears in Scripture, it is constantly pointing ahead of us to the joy of heaven.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

Saint Peter reminds us of the hope that we have even in the challenges of this life: “rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.”

And Our Lord himself, in the Gospel of Luke:

“...rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Do we feel that joy?

Have we chosen that joy?

Can we acknowledge the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, even today, in the middle of all the busyness and anxieties and challenges that we face, day after day, and which continue to fill the world with fear and suffering?

Has that light of Our Lord's presence broken into all the dark places where it is needed?

And if not, where do we still need to invite him in?

Prayer and penance are where we begin that process. These are the times and means by which we clear the space to receive whatever we need from the Lord to fully experience that joy.

It's important we realize this, because our Christian faith is often misunderstood as a joyless life.

From the world's perspective, all they can see are the things and choices we say 'no' to in order to choose Christ and all he offers.

But what are we saying 'yes' to?

A truly eternal joy, a communion of the heart with one who has loved us from before the beginning of time itself, and with all our brothers and sisters united in His Body, the Church.

For a gift like that, any price is worth paying.

As the prophet Isaiah writes,

“I rejoice heartily in the LORD,  
in my God is the joy of my soul;  
for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation  
and wrapped me in a mantle of justice,  
like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem,  
like a bride bedecked with her jewels.”

That, in a line, is a beautiful foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet that awaits us, the joy that we can begin to experience even right here, in this liturgy, as we share sacramentally in that union.

In the darkness of this life, and the sins of the world, that joy is so easy to miss.

But don't miss it.

In these remaining days of the blessed Advent season, my friends, invite Jesus Christ to shine the light of his love into your heart and make it ready to receive him, now, and for all the ages.