

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Third Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020

Rejoice, we are told on this Third Sunday of Advent. Paul says, "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Always give thanks to the Lord." Traditionally this third Sunday of Advent has been called "Rejoice Sunday," Gaudete Sunday. We even hear from the Prophet Isaiah, in our First Reading saying "I heartily rejoice in the Lord; in my God is the joy of my soul." These are similar to the words we hear from Mary in her Canticle in Luke's Gospel, as our Responsorial Psalm and repeated over and over, "My soul rejoices in my God." Rejoice Sunday, but I can't help but wonder how much joy Isaiah or Mary or Paul (Second Reading today) would have if they were with us today, and listening to the news or reading our newspapers? There seems to be more bad news than good news, so how does one rejoice in the Lord with all this bad news happening around us.

I know that in Isaiah, Mary or Paul's world, that they too faced difficulties and challenges. Israel found themselves in Exile as they hear from the Prophet Isaiah, Ancient Israel, was under Roman Authority, and many political and religious tensions surrounded Mary and Paul. And yet with the surrounding atmosphere, and the difficulties that they faced, we hear these words, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has **anointed** me; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication from our God." So even in the midst of dark surroundings God gives his people Good News.

These words in Isaiah are also familiar to us from the Gospels, for these are the same words Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth as he began his ministry and mission in and to the world. The reason why He is with us, and what He has come to do, proclaim the Kingdom of God. As Jesus begins His preaching and fulfilling the Word of God, and what I also notice about Isaiah, Mary, Paul, is that the good news, the joy they proclaim, comes from within. They don't find their joy outside of themselves in others or the world, only in God. So if we truly desire to celebrate this Joyful Sunday and understand the joy of the Lord, we too must search our hearts and allow God to fill us with this gift of joy.

That is why in spite of all the bad news that surrounded them, they still could proclaim the joy of the Lord. This Advent season invites us to have the same kind of heart as these prophets and saints. To rejoice in the Lord, no matter what surrounds us that is on the outside, we still can proclaim the joy of the Lord. It gives our hearts hope knowing that God is with us. We are preparing ourselves for God of our Salvation, the wonderful gift of God our Emmanuel. And if our hearts are open, then we can become more like Mary. Our hearts can sing, "My soul rejoices in my God."

The Second Reading this Sunday picks up the theme of rejoicing: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing." We can only rejoice always if we are praying without ceasing. God seems to be asking the impossible, isn't He? However we know that if Isaiah, Mary and Paul could rejoice always in the Lord, there has to be hope for us, the people of God. How were they able to have

joyful hearts in difficult times? Are we able to walk through a day, all the while keeping God always in our heart? It is not easy and we shall fail many times throughout the day. On those occasions, we see that God is not the center of our hearts; we can stop and invite Him once more to make us aware of His presence. Only in this way, can a heart rejoice in the Lord and pray unceasingly.

Along with the hearts of Isaiah, Mary, and Paul, we now once again look into the life of John the Baptist. This time from John's Gospel. We know that John the Baptist is not at all concerned about being considered great or important. His one concern is to point to Jesus Christ: the Messiah, the One who is to come, whose sandal strap he is unworthy to untie. Walking humbly with God is a way to have joyful heart.

Remember last week in Mark's Gospel, first, John the Baptist appears to Israel; John baptizes Jesus, then he is in prison; only then does Jesus appear to Israel. In the Gospel of John, however, John the Baptist and Jesus are baptizing in some ways at the same time together. The only difference is that the followers of Jesus are increasing while those of John are diminishing. So the Baptism is said to explain: He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30)

John the Baptist, has a joyful heart. He always points to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. We also can become people of joy when our lives too point to Jesus. Each in our own way must keep pointing to the Lord. Just as in the life of John the Baptist, the more we decrease, the more the Lord may increase. It is a challenge as well as an invitation to always witness the presence of God and God's love.

Also in John's Gospel, we do not have an account of John the Baptist, baptizing Jesus. Instead we hear him sharing words with his disciples concerning Jesus. John saw him coming, and says to his disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one whom I have said, one mightier than I is coming. I saw the Spirit come upon Him like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. Now I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God."

John's heart, like Isaiah, believed with their whole being that God would send salvation and redemption for His people. We are called to have the same trust in God: God loves us and brings us salvation. It is only because God loves us and forgives us that we can rejoice and be glad. Let us rejoice and be glad this Sunday as we delight in God's love. That same spirit of the Lord is upon us, inspiring us, encouraging us, strengthening us to continue the work of the Lord. May our hearts be open to experience the Joy of the Lord!