

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent. Theme: “REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS”**

The Third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means “Rejoice.” Rejoice Sunday of Advent calls us to rejoice because we are halfway through the season of Advent. But most importantly, as St. Paul put it in the second reading: “The Lord is near.” Soon, we will be celebrating Christmas, the birth of Christ, so there is a good reason for us to rejoice as all the three readings call our attention to.

All the three readings, especially the second reading, call us to rejoice in the Lord always. They all invite us to rejoice in the Lord and not in the world. St. Paul helps us to understand better and appreciate more the Rejoice Sunday we’re celebrating. It is interesting to know that the second reading is taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians. He wrote it when he was in prison and awaiting his execution for being a true apostle for Jesus and his Gospel. In this short letter of St. Paul to the Christian community in Philippi, he uses the words “Rejoice” and “Joy” a total of 15 times. I do believe his strong faith in Jesus Christ and in eternal life made him unafraid to die for Christ. He finds a true Joy and Happiness in serving Jesus and not afraid to die for him. No wonder he encourages the Philippians to rejoice always and not let anxiety etc. ruin their life. He put it so beautifully: “THE LORD IS NEARBY. HAVE NO ANXIETY AT ALL, BUT IN EVERYTHING, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, MAKE YOUR REQUEST KNOWN TO GOD.” We also will truly rejoice and find true happiness if we also put our entire life into the hands of Jesus Christ and not in someone else’s as St. Paul.

The prophet Zephaniah in the first reading invites his people to shout for joy because their salvation is near. For him, the political turmoil his people experienced could only be stopped by putting their faith and trust in Yahweh, and not in human beings. Zion is the holy temple in Jerusalem, hence it stands for God’s people. God is in their midst; hence, he will remove misfortunes and help them to overcome their enemies. It was a message of joy and comfort that the prophet Zephaniah brought to his people who were going through difficult times.

In the Gospel reading, you will notice that the people who were coming to John the Baptist were looking for a true Peace, Joy, and Happiness. John the Baptist was straightforward with them. He called their attentions to Social Justice, namely, they must share their food, cloaks with the needy/poor, stop cheating people, do not falsely accuse anyone, and they must be satisfied with their wages.

John, also aware of his personal identity and mission, directed them to Jesus, the Messiah. For John, he is only the forerunner of Jesus; he came only to prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Savior of the world. John is a perfect model for us all. He accepted himself and his mission God has called him for, hence he finds the joy and meaning in life. Do you know your personal identity and the mission God has created you for? Many people are going through life crises many times because they are living the identity and life of someone else. It’s sad and unfortunate not to live the life and the mission God has created you for.

St. Paul is one of the great men who discovered his identity and mission later in life. But when he met Christ, that helped him to find his true identity and mission, and his life totally changed. He made Christ the center of his entire life and died for him.

Advent is a season for us also to continue to search for the meaning and purpose we’re created for. It is only in Jesus that we can find a true Joy, Peace, and Happiness this third Sunday’s readings are asking for.

Let us always learn to rejoice no matter what we may be going through because with faith and trust in Jesus, we shall sail through the storms of life.

May our holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, help us to find the True, Joy, Peace, and Happiness for which we are created. Amen!