

**Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent - Year A**  
**St. Peter's 9:30/11:30/5:00 Masses - December 11, 2022**

**Isaiah 35:1-6,10** "Say to those of a fearful heart, 'Be strong. Do not fear! Here is your God.'"

**Psalms 146** "The Lord loves the righteous, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

**James 5:7-10** "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

**Matthew 11:2-11** "John asked: Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?"

**Reason For Joy**

**Introduction**

I loved going to see my cousin, Nick. He was three years older than me and I kind of worshipped everything he did. When he showed me how he was building muscles with Ben Weider's weightlifting system, I asked for a barbell. When we watched sports together, I learned to cheer for the same teams. He also told me jokes I shouldn't know, but I didn't tell my parents.

John was Jesus' slightly older cousin. But he was the opposite of me and Nick. John really did worship his younger cousin. When their mothers were both pregnant, Jesus' mother, Mary, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was so excited because, when she heard Mary's voice, she says the child in her womb - John - leaped for joy. Even before he was born, he knew Jesus was special. Later, when John was baptizing people, his cousin came to him for baptism and he said, you should be baptizing me, not me baptizing you. All his life, John knew that his cousin had come to show the world that God was present with his people.

You and I today are being asked to see Jesus in the same way as his cousin John. That's why we call it Gaudete Sunday. That means joyful Sunday, a day to rejoice that Jesus has come into the world and is ready to come into our lives again, to bring us joy.

The candle for Gaudete Sunday is pink. But don't call it pink. It's rose. Rose is the liturgical color used to signify joy, therefore we light the rose Advent candle on the third Sunday of Advent and the priests wear rose vestments.

Most of us adults don't wake up feeling joyful. We worry about a lot of things. But today is a day to give ourselves permission to feel the joy of a child at Christmas.

### **James**

We are in a state where Jesus has not yet come into our hearts or has already come but we are still needing to live that out. We can get discouraged. The Apostle James says: "Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Advent is a time during which we don't open the present of Jesus' birth. But, today's readings invite us to take a sneak peak at the gift that God is giving us, especially on this 'Rejoice' Sunday.

### **John the Baptist**

All four gospels tell us that to understand Jesus we have to go through John. As the story opens, he is in prison for telling Herod not to sin. Apparently, kings don't like to be told what they are doing wrong. John knows he probably won't be getting out of prison.

John has preached and identified Jesus as the chosen one. But now experienced doubt. So, why was John suddenly uncertain about whether Jesus is the one who is to come? John was fire and brimstone and Jesus didn't have the same style. He wrapped his body in rough animal hide and went out to the wilderness to tell the people who went to hear him: Quit your sinful ways. Repent and turn back to God. Jesus just hung out with people, ate meals with them, laughed and cried with them, healed them and told them that the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

Jesus is doing it so differently than John. Jesus doesn't say, yes I am the one. He asks John to look at what's happening around that can only be explained by God's presence. So he is probably always confused about Jesus. They have such different methods. He doesn't seem to be very messianic. So he sends his friends to ask Jesus the question.

## **Jesus**

Jesus could have given a simple answer to John's disciples, either yes, I'm the Messiah, or no I'm not. Instead, Jesus answers his question with another question: What do you think, John? The blind can see again. The crippled walk. Sick people are made well. The deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and even the poor have a reason to rejoice because the Good News of God's presence is being brought to them. Jesus replies that they should look at the signs.

Jesus was reminding John of what he already knew, that the sign of the kingdom, the sign of the Messiah, is exactly what both Isaiah had predicted. The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. The lame shall leap like a deer. And the ransomed of the Lord shall obtain everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The desert shall blossom and rejoice with singing. Say to those who are of a fearful heart: "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God." He will come and save you.

John needed to hear that everything was going according to God's plan. What do you think? Do we need to be reminded that everything is going according to God's plan to bless all people with his saving presence?

There is no other religious leader whose coming was foretold. This is the sign of authenticity. Jesus did not give a list of things to believe. We will be judged not by what we believe by what deeds were done in the body. They will know you are Christians by your love. That's what indicates

authenticity. Word and deed. Belief and action. As we prepare, consider what we believe about him but also what we do in service to him.

Blindness is a classical image of sin and alienation. Forgiveness is a light into our lives. Sin is a crippling ailment. We are paralyzed in our progress. He allows us to walk. Disease in the bible is often a symbol of sin. With our sins forgiveness it's like being healed of leprosy and the shame. Deaf to the needs of those around us. The ultimate symbol of sin is death. It eats away at our vitality. Jesus heals at all these levels. Present all of these things to God and ask for healing.

## **Joy**

The world does have much to offer that is very good, but we can grow to depend on those things. They are temporary and do not go to the depth of our deepest desire for joy. And, the more we have of the pleasures of this world, the harder it can be to make room for the joy of knowing God.

Jesus told his followers then and he tells us now: I want to share my joy with you so that your joy may be complete. When we are experiencing frustration and anxiety and fear and loneliness because of something lacking in this world, Jesus says to us: Come to me and I will give you what the world cannot give. He wants to come right into that place in our lives.

There is a directive given to those being ordained to the diaconate: "Believe what you read, teach what you believe, practice what you teach." It means, go to God's word where you will find his promises. It means, tell others about this sacrificial love he has for them. It means, live it out. Let your deeds speak about the presence of the Saviour.

I was at the bedside of Deacon Albert Henri, a beautiful man, just days before he died. He wasn't expecting to get sick. He was still relatively young. What he said to me, I will always remember. He said: I don't want to die, but I believe I have completed what God asked me to do." This is what I want to be able to say when I am at that point.

## **Call To Conversion**

Don't be afraid. Your God is here. Fearful persons cannot be joyful persons. Like John, we too have to ask Jesus the question: Are you the one or shall we look for another? Maybe we should look for someone else, maybe an entertainer or an athlete, or a politician.

The message of the pink candle is that the Lord is near. God is coming to us at Christmas. He is in motion towards us. Are we in motion towards God? Will we walk by his light. Today we can start to see the fullness of the coming of the light. We can be the presence of that light in the world. Who is it in our life that needs a reason to hope, to rejoice. Can we be that pink Advent candle? Finish your Christmas shopping and hug someone .

## Key Passages

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near*

**Collect:** *O God, your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's nativity. Enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.*

**Isaiah:** *The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad. The desert shall rejoice and blossom. They shall see the glory and majesty of our God. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong. Do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance to save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

**Psalms:** *It is the Lord who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind and lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever.*

**James:** *Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the judge is standing at the doors!*

**Matthew:** *When John the Baptist heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word to Jesus by his disciples: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered: "Go and tell John what you see, that the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me." Then, speaking to the crowds about John, he said: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone dressed in soft robes, like those in palaces? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'*