

**Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent - Year A**  
**St. Peter's Weekend Masses - December 14/15, 2019**

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

**Psalms 146** "It is the Lord who keeps faith ... The Lord will reign forever."

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

**Mt. 11:2-11** "No one is greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in heaven is greater than he."

**Again I Say: Rejoice**

**Introduction**

Rejoice in the Lord always. Like St. Paul, I say it again: Rejoice, for the Lord is near. Come, let us worship him. Advent is a season of prayer, penance and preparation of our hearts. Today, on Gaudete Sunday, we are shifting to joy, as our anticipation of the coming of Christ grows. 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.

A priest named Fr Joshua told a story in a homily, about when he was a young boy at Christmas time, eager for a Transformers action figure. His parents had a rule that he couldn't get out of bed until 5 a.m. to wake them up and open gifts. But young Joshua couldn't stand it, so at 4 a.m. he snuck down to the tree to have a look. One present was marked with, "To Joshua." Against his better judgment, he peeled back a little bit of the wrapping paper and saw the Transformers figure he had hoped for.

He put the wrapping paper back together and snuck back upstairs. Then, about an hour later, he woke up his parents and headed downstairs. Much to all their surprise, they found a note from Santa that explained that, because Joshua had peeked at his toy, Santa had taken back all the presents.

Well, little Joshua had never cried so hard in his life. It turned out it was all a joke by Joshua's, Mark, because Mark saw him peeking. The presents came back out. Then Fr Wagner joked that "The unfortunate end of that story is that we haven't seen my brother Mark since."

During Advent, Christians wait in eager anticipation for the gift of Christmas: the coming of Jesus. 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**

This year we really emphasize that John the Baptist is our guide through Advent. Why does anyone really care what John thinks? As Jesus points out, John didn't live in a nice warm castle with soft beautiful clothes, like a king. 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. And, during Advent, we repeat John's refrain. Repent, get right with God. Make a path in your hearts so you can receive him with joy at Christmas.

Now John could have given his message to way more people if he had just gone to Jerusalem, by the temple. But, he was out by the Jordan River, the exact same place where the people of Israel had crossed that river to enter into the land of God's promise. John was reminding people that, despite hard lives and being oppressed by a foreign nation, the promise was waiting to be fulfilled again in their own lives. The new promised land was still waiting to be entered. The Jordan River was also where Elijah, the greatest prophet, was last seen centuries earlier. If we don't get that, Jesus comes right out and says it: John is the new Elijah, who comes from God to announce the one who is to come.

So, why was John suddenly uncertain about whether Jesus is the one who is to come? After all, he was the one who baptized Jesus and recognized him as God's anointed one, the Messiah.

Well, John was expecting God to judge the people for turning away from him. So, just maybe he had some doubt whether Jesus was that Messiah, 'The One'. And now he was in prison for defending faithful marriage, because he dared to tell the truth that it was wrong for King Herod to marry his brother's wife. Herod didn't want to hear that. You can imagine John might have been a little depressed and wondering if he had been wrong about Jesus. So he asked: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

### **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 was reminding John of what he already knew, that the sign of the kingdom, the sign of the Messiah, is exactly what both Isaiah and the psalmist describe in our readings: "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. 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 ransomed of the Lord shall obtain everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

John needed to hear that everything was going according to God's plan.

Do I believe what I see and hear? Do I trust the words and deeds of God? 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?

## **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. Many today have given up on that kind of 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. That is the destiny for which we have been made. And there is no comparison.

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. He will descend on this altar today to be present with us, right into the middle of the ways we have distanced ourselves from him, through sin, or just plain apathy. That is what our pink candle means.

## **A Deacon's Commitment**

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.

Very slowly, because I am a very slow learner, I have grown in my hope, and this has given me a joy that is not yet complete but is growing. When I was ordained a deacon, Bishop Henry gave us an instruction. He said, "Give people a reason to hope. In other words, to rejoice."

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 Action**

Like John, we too have to ask Jesus the question: Are you the one or shall we look for another? We can be disappointed and look for someone else, maybe an entertainer or an athlete, or a politician.

Find God in the wilderness, not the mall parking lot which is kind of a wilderness. Go out there. Go in the water. Begin afresh. Our Reconciliation service is this coming Wednesday.

But 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?