

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Advent

You may know that this 3rd Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*. *Gaudete* is the Latin word for “rejoice”. And during this latter part of Advent, we shift our reflection from “the Lord is coming” to “the Lord is near”. So, it’s cause for rejoicing that our celebration of Christ’s birth is almost here! Yes, there is the excitement and anticipation of “the most wonderful time of the year”. But, there’s also something much deeper to rejoice in. As we know, for as much build-up as there is leading up to Christmas, the day will be over in the blink of an eye. This holiday flies by much too quickly for many of us. All of the preparations, the decorations, and the delicious food will be done with before we know it. And therefore, while a part of our rejoicing is contained in the actual celebrations to come in a week’s time, the experience of the holiday itself is just too transient.

And so, much more, the celebration of Jesus’ Nativity is meant to point us to a deeper rejoicing – one which is not dependent on the right presents, or a white Christmas, or even everyone coming together. The deeper rejoicing is all about the greatest gift ever given to us. As the gift of God the Father, His eternal Son has become one of us to save us from sin and to welcome us into His eternal kingdom. But, Jesus just didn’t come to die for us. He also came to reveal to us the Father’s love in human form. He came to show us personally how much God loves each one of us.

And in this way, a deeper kind of rejoicing is possible – one, which knows no end. In fact, the root of the word rejoicing means “to own, to possess, to enjoy the possession of”. And when we have a true personal realization of how much God loves us and that nothing can take His love away, then there is cause for great rejoicing. Not only does God love us one day out of the year. He has loved us and will love us for all eternity! In personal relationship with Jesus, we possess the living God, who eternally possesses us. And whatever happens in this life – sickness, heartache, despair, worry, job loss, sin, even death – the unchanging truth is that God still loves us!

Making this love personal, the Prophet Isaiah in the first reading identifies some of those God has come to – the poor – to bring them glad tidings; the brokenhearted – to heal them; the captives – to proclaim freedom to them; the prisoners – to give them release. And since Jesus took this very prophecy of Isaiah on his own lips, and proclaimed to all that it was “fulfilled in our hearing”, we can “rejoice heartily in the Lord for He is the joy of the soul”. When we really “get it” that God’s love is true and real for me, then it’s possible to “rejoice always” and to “give thanks in all circumstances”, because nothing changes the fact that God loves me.

Recently, Pope Francis spoke about our participation in the Eucharist at Mass as an important means of preparing us for this eternal rejoicing in heaven, where it will be “Sunday without sunset: no more tears, grief, or pain, but only the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord.” Imagine an eternity of being immersed in God’s perfect, unconditional love. Imagine thanking Him and praising Him, and coming to know that love more and more fully. Will we ever get tired of worshipping God in heaven? Will we get bored? Well, do you get tired of seeing loved ones each Christmas? Do we ever say, “Well, I just saw you last time, so I’m good?”

This year, our celebration of Christ’s birth falls on a Monday this year, Christmas Eve on Sunday. Therefore, we have the opportunity to come worship the Lord and immerse ourselves in His love twice in one or two days’ time. Our Mass schedule on Saturday and Sunday for the 4th Sunday of Advent will be the usual weekend Mass schedule. And our schedule on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day will be the same as usual too. Yes, I know this may be a sacrifice for some, but Jesus is the reason for this season. So, please join me and our parish family as we conclude Advent, and welcome Christmas, and continue rejoicing in the Lord. God bless you.