

Third Sun Advent Dec 13, 2016
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The 3rd Sunday of Advent is traditionally called *Gaudete* or *Rejoice Sun*...That's why we light the rose-colored candle...and "rejoicing" is the theme of today's 1st two readings ... In the 1st reading, the prophet Zephaniah encourages his fellow Jews to: "*Shout for joy, sing joyfully, O Israel, the Lord is in your midst!*"...and in the 2nd reading St. Paul – writing from a prison cell in Rome – exhorts the church in Philippi to: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice! ...Have no anxiety. The Lord is near.*" ...It's "rejoice, rejoice, rejoice"...until the Gospel....where we hear again –as we did last week - John the Baptist telling those who came to him to be baptized: "*Produce good works as evidence of your repentance...one mightier than I is coming...and He will gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.*"...So, what is God's Word calling us to do on this 3rd Sun of Advent?... REJOICE? Don't worry, be happy...Throw some steaks on the grill, have a glass of wine...Or REPENT? ...Straighten up your life, clean up your act...The answer is: BOTH! Let me explain.

Advent is a time to prepare for the Lord's coming...Now, we don't pretend we're awaiting the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem...That already happened over 2000 years ago...During Advent, we prepare to celebrate that momentous event, not because it provides us with a charming story to tell our children about the Baby Jesus,... but because from the moment Jesus took on our flesh, the world would never be the same....By the way Jesus LIVED His life, He showed us how God meant human beings to live when He created them ...By the way Jesus GAVE His life, He showed us there was no limit to God's love and mercy. ...The impact of that 1st Christmas and how it changed the world forever, gives us plenty of reason to rejoice.

So, if during Advent we're not waiting for Baby Jesus, what are we waiting for?... Well, the same thing we should be waiting for every day of the year: the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ...We know He's coming back, right? ...But do many of us ever think about His return, even during Mass when we say words like: "*We proclaim your death, Lord J. until you come again.*"?...The Church gives us these days of Advent to remind us to live in joyful hope, and to be ready for the day of Christ's return...In the Gospel two Sundays ago, Jesus spoke about that day and cautioned us: "For that day will assault everyone on the face of the earth. ...Pray that you have the strength to stand ERECT before the Son of Man."...Advent reminds us to live with the expectation that today might be the day Jesus returns to the world,...or it might be the day we breathe our last breath...Whichever it is, will we be able to stand ERECT before the Son of Man?

My friends, Advent is **not only** a time to rejoice at the Good News that the Lord has come and that He will come again, ... it's also a time to take a good look at our lives and ask, "If Christ came today, would this be the way I would want Him to find me?...Or is there something I need to change to be ready to meet Him? ...The same Good News that gives us reason to celebrate and rejoice also calls us to make changes in how we live our life.

Here's what it's like...We parents can relate to this...Remember when you announced that you were expecting your 1st child?...The 1st thing people said to you were things like: "congratulations, ...we're so happy for you...that's wonderful news."...But if they were parents themselves, very often they followed that with something like: "Boy, is your life gonna change!" ...Now, if you were like me, you didn't believe them, until the little critter made his grand entrance and– yep– your life was changed forever...You received this wonderful gift of new life, and there was a lot of rejoicing and celebrating, but if you tried to keep living the way you were before, it didn't work. You had new responsibilities. You had to make changes...It's the same with Advent and Christmas. .We rejoice at the wonderful gift of new life in Jesus Christ...But with that gift comes

responsibilities...Some things are going to have to change. ..That's why the Church sticks John the Baptist in our faces every year at this time.

John's job was more than just getting people wet...People came to him for baptism, but it was in response to his message...His message back then and his message today is: "REPENT, the Messiah is coming!... Prepare the way of the Lord...Make straight a path for Him"...In other words, get your life straightened out...take down any barriers that stand in the way of your relationship with the Lord. Last Sun, we heard another John - Deacon John - tell us over and over, "Repentance is a serious business."

Now, it's important to understand what "repenting" means...It's not just saying, "I'm sorry."...no matter how much you mean it...How many of you were children at one time? Ok, most of you . Right? ...I'll bet something like this has happened to you ...Your little brother made you mad, so you slugged him...Then he went crying to your mother, right?...and what did she do?...She came to get you, pulling you by the ear to come and face the poor little victim...And then what?...She told you to tell him you were sorry....So you mumbled, "Sorry."..."That's not good enough. Say it like you mean it."...So you said it louder, "Sorry!"...Let me ask you. Did you really mean it?...Maybe you did,....but you still thought the little bugger was a rotten skunk for ratting on you .

To repent is to do more than say I'm sorry for my sin...We live in an age where it's not PC to talk about sin...People don't sin, they just make mistakes. I guess J. died for our mistakes...Repenting means calling our sin a sin and then doing something about it!...When the people asked John the Baptist, "What is it we should do?" ,..He didn't say, go and think about your sins and be sorry for them...No, he told them what they needed to change in order to turn away from sin and turn back to God...He told the tax collectors to stop taking more money than they were supposed to take...He told the soldiers not to terrorize people or falsely accuse them...He told the person with two coats to keep one and give the other to someone who had none. ...Bottom line: to repent means to change whatever it is that is hurting our relationship with God and with others...It might be something we did or something we failed to do...It might be some attitude, ...or some prejudice...It might be an unwillingness to forgive someone, especially during this Year of Mercy which Pope Francis has proclaimed as a time to extend to others the mercy that our God extends to us....You know, forgive the little bugger and give him a hug...Whatever our sin, we repent by acknowledging it, and then making a commitment to change ...to do better.

Now if it seems like John the Baptist's call to repentance is putting a damper on our Advent rejoicing, listen to the last line in today's Gospel, " Exhorting them in many ways, John preached Good News to the people." ...What Good News did he preach?...".The Messiah is coming...The one God sent to redeem the world....Prepare the way for Him."..In John's Gospel, John the Baptist sees Jesus walking toward him., and he cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."...Yes, that baby born in a manger is our Lamb of God – our perfect sacrifice for not only the sins of the world, but for all our sins day after day.

You see, God does want us to be sorry for our sins and to repent and rearrange our life so we don't fall into sin again,...but He doesn't want us to fall into despair when we do fail...He wants us to know that because His Son endured the pain of the cross and took on the sins of the whole world,..He will forgive us over and over...Nothing we do can keep us from experiencing God's mercy if we are truly sorry and truly repent...And there is no better way to let God's mercy wash over us than to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance which we will do tomorrow evening at 7:00...It will be a communal Penance service with an opportunity for individual confession.

If all this isn't Good News, then I don't know what is. ..If this isn't reason to rejoice and shout "Alleluia!"...I don't know what is...May all of our hearts rejoice that Jesus came into the world as one of us...that He gave Himself for each of us,...and that He will come again...And may we be ready when He comes to take all who have been faithful to Him to live forever with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!