

The 3rd Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete Sun* or *Rejoice Sun*...(*Gaudete* is Latin for rejoice ...*On rejoice Sun, we lite the pink candle on the Advent wreath*), ...And “rejoicing” is the theme of today’s 1st two readings ... In the 1st reading, the prophet Zepheniah encourages his fellow Jews: “*Shout for joy, sing joyfully, O Israel, the Lord is in your midst!*”...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 ... The Lord is near.*”...And in our Psalm, we sang “*Cry out in joy and gladness.*”... So, it’s “rejoice, rejoice, rejoice”,...until the Gospel where the mood changes dramatically as we heard John the Baptist tell those who came to be baptized what they needed to do to be truly repentant before he would baptize them...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, hav a glass of wine?...Or REPENT: Straighten out your life, clean up your act...Get right with God. ...Well, the answer is: BOTH REJOICE and REPENT. Let me explain.

Advent is a time to prepare for the Lord’s coming...During Advent, we don’t pretend we’re awaiting the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem...That already happened 2000 years ago..What we are doing is preparing to CELEBRATE that earth-shattering event,...not because it gives us 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...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...when He returns in glory to set all things right and to establish the Kingdom of God in all its fullness...We know He’s coming back, right?Yet how often do we think about His return, even at Mass when we say words like: “*We proclaim Your death, O Lord, until You come again.*”?...In Advent, the Church reminds 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 full awareness that today might be the day Jesus returns,..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?

You see, 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 look at our lives and ask, “If Christ came for me today, would this be how 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 the changes we may need to make in how we are living our life. ...That’s why the Church sticks good, old 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. ...and His message back then and his message to us today is: “REPENT, the Messiah is coming!...Prepare the way of the Lord”... One of the 1st commands from Jesus recorded in the Gospels was, “Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand.” ...Repentance is a serious business.

Now, it’s important to be clear on what it means to repent...It’s not just saying, “I’m sorry,”...no matter how much we mean it...How many of you were children at one time? Ok, some of us still are...Did something like this ever happened to you? ...Your little brother made you so mad, that you hauled off and slugged him. ...Then he went crying to your mother,... right?...And what did she do?.

She came and got you, and pulled 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 wasn't good enough for your mom... "Say it like you mean it." ... "Ok, I'm sorry!" ... Now, did you really mean it?... Even if you did, were you thinking, "the little bugger deserved it... just wait 'til the next time?" ...

To repent is to do more than say I'm sorry for my sin... Repenting means calling my sin a sin and then doing something about it! ... In our Gospel, 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 the." ... 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 keeping us from living the teachings of Jesus Christ... It might be something we did or something we failed to do... It could be some prejudice... selfishness... lack of concern for people in need. It could be an unwillingness to forgive others the way God forgives us... Whatever our sin, we repent by acknowledging it, and calling on the Holy Spirit to help us to change ... to turn it around... to do better.

Ok, now if John's call to repentance seems to be taking all the joy out of Rejoice Sun, ... listen again to the last line in today's Gospel: "Exhorting them in many ways, John preached Good News to the people." ... Hear that?... What Good News did he preach?... "The Messiah is coming, ... the One God sent to redeem the world... The One whose sandal straps I am not worthy to unfasten." ... Later in the Gospels, John sees Jesus walking toward him, and he cries out to all who were there, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." ... Sound familiar?... That baby whose birth we will soon celebrate is the Lamb of God – the sacrificial lamb who would endure the pain of the cross to take away all of our sins... every sin, day after day.

My friends, it's because of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that when we've got some bad stuff we're doing... we can confess it, ... ask for forgiveness, ... ask for the strength to repent, to stay away from that bad stuff -... AND those sins will be forgiven... those sins will be forgotten... we will begin all over with a clean slate.

Nothing we do can keep us from experiencing GOD's infinite mercy if we are truly sorry and truly repent... And when we fail, when we fall back into sin - and we will - God will never say, "That's it, that's your last chance... I'm done with you." ... There is no limit to God's mercy... He will give us chance after chance. And He gives us the supernatural help we need to keep the slate clean. ... We have the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, ... working in us, ... pointing us in the right direction... always reminding us of what Jesus taught us and showed us about how to live... We have Christ offering His Body and Blood to us in the Eucharist to strengthen us for those times we find it hard to do the right thing... And we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation - either in a communal penance service or in private confession with a priest - giving us the opportunity to reflect on and work on whatever it is we know God wants us to change.... What more can we ask God to do for us?

If all that is not Good News, ... if all that is not reason to REJOICE, ... not only on REJOICE SUNDAY, ... but on every day of the year, ... then I don't know what is...

May our hearts rejoice always that Jesus came into the world as one of us... that He gave Himself for each of us, ... and that He will come again in glory... And may we be able to stand erect when He comes to take all who have been faithful to Him... to live forever in heaven with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. AMEN!