

Third Sunday of Advent – Cycle A

December 16, 2007

REJOICE. REJOICE. REJOICE.

Today the Church throughout the world celebrates Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means rejoice. And the name of the Sunday is taken from the first words of the old opening prayer

REJOICE. The *rejoice* we hear today is not an expletive, not an exclamation of praise like Alleluia! or Praise God! It is in the imperative mood. It is a command. ***Rejoice.*** (*Period*) ***Christians, we have no choice. Rejoice.*** St. Paul tells us to rejoice always.

The prophet Isaiah spills out reasons for rejoicing...Deserts and parched lands bloom; Weak knees will be strengthened; Feeble hands made firm; Frightened hearts will disappear; God will come and saved us. How will we be saved? The eyes of the blind will be open; Ears of the deaf will be cleared; The lame will leap and the mute will sing; Those who need it (that's all of us folks) will be ransomed - saved from our captivity to sin. We will be filled with joy and gladness. Sorrow and mourning will flee. Ok, how many want to sign up for that trip. Here I come, Isaiah. Bring it on. Rejoice.

Now, you may be saying, for what? My arthritis is killing me - every joint aches. I haven't gotten full nights sleep for years; I can never make ends meet, no matter how hard I try. It seems as though I can never understand my kids. I've come this far in life and I feel somewhat unsuccessful - even though I have worked long and hard. My knees ache. My hip needs replacement. My eyes aren't working as well as they use to. My job is not going where I would like it to go. I get tired too quickly. I never seem to get my work done. My *rejoice* has a question mark after it, not an exclamation point, or even a period.

In the midst of all this you are asking, - no, TELLING me to rejoice.

Why? As Christians we are a joyful, hopeful people. Not necessarily giddy people or on an emotional high. As a matter of fact, some days we are down right low, maybe even miserable. So why rejoice? Because basically, we are a hope filled people. We are unequivocally optimistic. We believe that God's story and our story is a comedy not a tragedy. Remember the difference from English Class? The difference between a comedy and a tragedy is the ending.

There may be many tragic parts to the Christians life. In fact there are—look at John the Baptist. Losing your head I would consider a bit of a tragedy. Jesus life had a lot of sad parts also, so did Mary and most of the Saints. But we believe with all our heart and soul

and mind, that there is light at the end of the tunnel. And based on this belief, joy burst forth in the midst of our weak knees and our aching joints and our troubled relationships.

Somehow, someday, God will reach through all of that and pull us toward himself. Pull us toward that peaceable kingdom, for which we have been made from the first moment of our existence. And then will the blooms come forth in the desert, and the eyes of the blind will be healed, and the lame will dance, and the mute sing. It might not be right now, but soon and very soon, we are going to see the Lord. Death and pain, and suffering, separation, hardship and misunderstanding will be things of the past. Brief moments of tragedy, in the midst of one great and grand divine comedy.

The glory that God has in store for us is so powerful, so wonderful, that it overtakes all the aches and pains, the heartaches and loneliness, shadows and disappointments, frustrations and failures that are part of our lives as we know it here. These aches and pains are not taken away; but the light we see at the end of the tunnel will overshadow them.

We are preparing to celebrate the coming of our savior. We have been saved. The child born in Bethlehem has broken the power of sin and failure, sorrow and pain and addiction over all of us. *Salve* means to heal—that's where we get the word save- to heal. We put salve on our wounds to heal. Oh, it might not heal immediately, might not feel good at once, but healing is on the way. The salvation promised will be ours.

Have you ever notice that a wedding day is a day of great joy for everyone. Even the sick and the feeble relative who has not been feeling good for years, not been out of the house for months, manage to get all fixed up and dressed up and somehow with the help of many different people, they manage to get here to the wedding. They look better than they have for a long time, and they actually feel better and enjoy the wedding. Somehow, people are able to put aside their hurts for a day. They are not cured. They are still as sick as they were. Yet, something happens at a wedding that brings joy to all involved.

Christians, we are preparing to celebrate the wedding on December 25th - the wedding of heaven and earth; the wedding of God and human kind. We are preparing to celebrate the fact that, for some strange reason, God has chosen to come among us, to be one of us. To bring us salvation—healing, restoring right order and balance to our life, both physical and spiritual healing. That might not come right away. But we know it is on the way, *soon and very soon*. The transformation we hope and long for will take place in a transfigured world.

It is our Christian hope, that in the transfigured world that we are called to share with Jesus, the angels and saints, and with all who have gone before us in faith, will be ours someday; and the weak knees and troubled hearts, and squeaky joints and sleepless nights, and calendars that have more doctors visits than holidays, birthdays, weddings, and parties, will all be distant memories - weak and faded in the glory of God that is promised to us, as we wait for God's coming and sing *soon and very soon*. Rejoice always. I say it again. Rejoice. Our salvation is at hand!