

Advent 3C 2015

Rejoice in the Lord

If you look at our Advent wreath, you will see the candle we have lit today is different from the others. While the other candles are purple, this candle is pink because this third Sunday of Advent is a time to rejoice. And so, as we draw ever closer to Christmas, the church exhorts us to rejoice because the Lord is near, to rejoice because the Lord is about to appear in our lives.

Today's readings are filled with words of joy and rejoicing. The prophet Zechariah tells us to shout for joy, to be glad and exult with all our heart for the Lord is in our midst as a mighty savior. The prophet even says that God is rejoicing over us because God knows our redemption is at hand.

In today's responsorial psalm we sang "cry out with joy and gladness; for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel." In today's second reading St. Paul encourages us "to rejoice in the Lord always." There is no need for anxiety because God who surpasses all our understanding guards our hearts and minds in Christ.

Have no anxiety, St. Paul says. But how is possible not to be anxious these days? Rejoice in the Lord always, he says. But how can we rejoice when the world seems to be falling into chaos? How can we rejoice when our own lives seem to be falling into the chaos? How can we rejoice in a time that seems so evil, so bent on violence and destruction?

While we may be tempted to be discouraged and pessimistic, there is no room for pessimism and discouragement in the Christian life if we know and experience the love of Jesus Christ. For if we know and experience Christ's love, we know the joy of the gospel. This joy of the gospel is not naïve optimism that overlooks the evil around us. The joy of the gospel is not an emotional high. It is the joy of the faith and hope we have in God through his Son Jesus Christ. It is the joy of the life of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, making us a living temple of the living God. No one can take this joy from us, unless we surrender it, for this joy is the echo of God's life in our soul.

Some people seem to reflect this joy all the time, no matter what happens. You can see this joy in Pope Francis. You see it in his smile. You see it in his serene behavior. He understands the sin and hurt that pervades the world and the church. But he is ever joyful because he knows the final victory belongs to God. The joy of the gospel, he says, fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus because those who accept Christ's offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness.

Despite the power of sin and evil, then, there is every reason to rejoice in the Lord. For the Lord is near; the Lord is about to enter our lives once more. And so, for us who know the infinite bounty of God's mercy, there is always reason to rejoice. As we receive the Eucharist today, let us be mindful that the joy of Christ fills our hearts once more.