

Advent 2015
Rejoice in the Lord (3)

This third Sunday of Advent is traditionally called *Gaudete Sunday*. The term comes from the opening words of the old Latin introit for today's the Mass, which begins *Gaudete in Domino semper, iterum dico vobis, Gaudete. Dominus enim prope est*, which is translated, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed the Lord is near."

You will notice that the texts of today's Mass make frequent references to joy and rejoicing. In the opening prayer of today's Mass, we prayed: "O, God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation." In the first reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah, we heard these words: "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem." In today's second reading, St. Paul exhorts us, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice. And in today's gospel we hear that the people were filled with expectation at the preaching of John the Baptist because they knew God was about to do something new.

If you look carefully at our Advent wreath, you will see that the third candle, which was lit this week, is pink. This is yet another sign of our joy because the Lord is near. The Church rejoices this Sunday because she knows that the Lord is near and her salvation is at hand. She is filled with hope and expectation because she knows God is about to do something new that will fill her with lasting joy, and so she rejoices.

But how can we rejoice this season? Look at the world about us. It seems to be filled with so much violence, hatred, and evil. Human life has been trivialized by the hatred and violence that surrounds us. And so there is a temptation to fall into a dark pessimism and say that things are getting worse and will only get worse.

While this is how some people think; it is not the way we think. As disciples of Jesus Christ we firmly believe that the victory over sin and death was won on the cross. We firmly believe that God's victory in Christ will be revealed at the end of the ages, when Christ comes again. We believe that God will be triumphant because God has been victorious in Christ. And so we believe and hope and rejoice.

Christian joy is not a giddy happiness; it is a deep and abiding hope that God has conquered evil in Christ and that God will be triumphant when Christ returns. Christian joy is hope and confidence that not even the darkest hour can take away. So on this Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete Sunday*, rejoice because the Lord is near. Indeed, he is at the door. Do not be anxious for "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Father Matera