

## Third Sunday of Advent 17 December 2017

***“Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say rejoice...The Lord is nigh...”*** Phil. 4:4-5

Today, the Church is filled with joy as the Lord is very close. It is almost the time of His coming on Christmas Day. The Church calls this Sunday **“Gaudete Sunday”** after the first word of today’s Introit, **“Gaudete....”** **“Rejoice in the Lord always....”** In honor of this joyful Sunday, the Church makes exceptions to the austerity of Advent: the organ is played at the Mass and the vestments are rose-coloured instead of the penitential purple. St. Paul sounds the theme for today’s liturgy with his lyrical passage from the *Epistle to the Philippians*: **“Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say rejoice.... the Lord is nigh.”** Phil. 4:4-5. The tone of the language from now until Christmas is one of gladness: the Church begins her nocturnes for the office with the words, **“The Lord is now nigh; come, let us adore.”** Dom Gueranger in *The Liturgical Year* Vol. I, p. 204 comments: **“Who can be near so burning a fire, and yet be cold? Do we not feel that he is coming to us despite all obstacles? He will let nothing be a barrier between Himself and us, neither His own infinite high majesty, nor our exceeding lowliness, nor our many sins.”** The Church also conveys to us in the *Gospel from St. John* (1:19-28) the necessary attitudes in order to prepare for Jesus’ coming. When a delegation from Jerusalem ask St. John the Baptist who he is, he answers, **“I am the voice of one that cries in the desert: Make smooth the way of the Lord,’ as the Prophet Isaiah said.”** Jn. 1:23 We too must cry out that the Lord is nigh. We must also make sure His path is smooth without any evidence of sin and vice because the Lord is holy and we, like St. John the Baptist, are unworthy to loose His sandals: **“In the midst of you stands One whom ye know not, Who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not fit to loose.”** Jn. 1:26-27

### Joy and Gladness

In today’s *Epistle to the Philippians* (Phil. 4:4-7) St. Paul is jubilant. Although he is in prison in Rome, his epistle is filled with peace and joy. From his prison cell, St. Paul teaches us today that despite all the troubles which evil men can give us, we need to treat even our enemies with kindness:

**“Let your kindness become known to all. The Lord is nigh.”** Phil. 4:5. What in this world can trouble us when the Lord is with us. ---**“The Lord is nigh!”** St. Paul exhorts us not to be anxious for we trust in the Lord when we make our wishes known to Him in thanksgiving: **“In nothing be anxious, but in all your prayer and supplications make known your wishes with thanksgiving to God.”** Phil 4:6 Msgr. Patrick Boylan comments on souls who are thankful: **“The Christian who is ready to thank God for everything that His Providence may send, will not be disturbed in soul or suffer any lessening of peace through the malice of and buffeting of the world.”** (*The Sunday Epistles and Gospels*, p. 23) With prayer for all his needs, the faithful Christian gains confidence and is given the peace of God that comes with the fruits of the Holy Spirit: peace, joy, kindness and patience. These are the blessings which will be given to those who **“Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say rejoice...The Lord is nigh...”** Phil. 4:4-5

**“I am the voice of one that cries in the desert: Make smooth the way of the Lord,’ as the Prophet Isaiah said.”** Jn. 1:23

Again, as we saw in last week’s gospel, St. John holds the key to understanding the mystery of Christ’s Coming. John is the voice who cries out to the people to prepare the way for the Messiah. He preaches a baptism of repentance for sins for there can be no obstacles in the path of the Holy One of God: **“Make smooth the way of the Lord.”** Jn. 1:23 John baptizes with water to prepare the souls for the Messiah. He is the lone voice that cries for repentance. Msgr. Boylan comments on this passage: **“The Baptist is a voice that orders the way of the Messiah to be made ready: his baptism is concerned with the preparation of that way. It is only in a penitential spirit that the Messiah can be received—and to develop that spirit in the Jews the preaching and the baptism of the Baptist are directed. The Pharisees are lacking in that spirit and so they fail to recognize the One Who ‘stands up’ already ‘in their midst.”** (Boylan, p. 29)

**“I am not the Christ.”** Jn. 1:20

How much we should admire St. John the Baptist for his humility and truth! He does not pretend to be someone special. He says very

definitely, ***“I am not the Christ.”*** Jn. 1:20 Later, he admonishes the Jewish leaders that the Christ is in their midst and that he (St. John) is not even worthy to loosen his sandals: ***“In the midst of you stands One whom ye know not, Who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not fit to loose.”*** Jn. 1:26-27 As John baptizes only with water, it is implied that the Messiah, the Holy One of God, will baptize with spirit and power. St. Luke tells us that St. John warns these Jewish leaders: ***“...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*** Lk. 3:16 If we are going to recognize Christ on Christmas Day, then we need to know that we are sinners in need of repentance before the all-holy Christ Child who comes solely to give us His peace and love and save us for His eternal kingdom. ***“Glory to God in the Highest and peace on earth among men of good will.”*** Lk. 2:14

### Prayer for “Gaudete Sunday”

As we prepare with joy for the Coming of Christ on Christmas Day, let us be like St. John the Baptist and prepare the way for the Lord by removing from our lives all that would prevent Jesus from coming to us by saying this prayer:

**“My God and my Saviour, I believe in You, I trust in You. I seek for You, yet I know that You are near me, and in me: near me, hidden under the Eucharistic veil; in me, by grace. O Lord, make me know You! Do not permit it to happen to me as to the Jews: You were living in the midst of them and they knew You not. Grant that my soul may always have a lively faith; increase my faith, for faith is the light by which I can know You on earth. You are within me, Lord, I know it, I believe it, even if I cannot feel You. But if you wish, You can illumine my soul with Your light and make me know your divine mysterious presence.”** Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD, *Divine Intimacy*, p. 46 Let us also pour out our hearts to the Infant Saviour this Christmas. Let us ask Our Lady, the Immaculate, to teach us the secrets that she had in her heart as she adored her Infant Son and God on the first Christmas day. Let us pray the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary with Our Lady and ask her to help us to repent of our sins so that we will be filled with the peace that is given to men and women of ***“good will.”*** Lk. 2:14

### Addenda:

#### More on the Immaculate Conception

Some may wonder why it was so necessary for Our Lady to be freed from all sin, both original and actual, with her Immaculate Conception. First of all, it would be unbecoming for the Divine Saviour to have a mother who would be connected with sin in any way. Second, it was most important that Our Lady would never have been under the power of Satan. ***Genesis 3:15.*** This text of the Protoevangelium, the first Gospel, was spoken by God to the serpent in the garden immediately after Adam transgressed God’s precept of not eating from the tree of good and evil: ***“I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed. She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.”*** Thus it is the woman and her seed who will crush the head of the serpent. Jesus and Mary are united in the work of the redemption.

Blessed Pius IX in his solemn definition, *Ineffabilis Deus*, (“*Ineffable God*”) made in 1854, says of the Immaculate Conception: **“The most holy Virgin Mary was, in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin.... God so loved her with a unique predilection that He filled her with the greatest abundance of his celestial gifts and her participation in the Divine Life exceeds that of all angels and saints. Her life reflects so great a fullness of innocence and sanctity that a more exalted creature cannot be conceived of except by the creator Himself.”**