

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent B “Choose Joy”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And now for a little bit of history...Did you know that the season of Advent used to be a penitential season of forty days leading up to Christmas? Yes, there was a time when we essentially had two seasons of Lent in the liturgical calendar. In the dioceses where this was the custom, say around the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it was called St. Martin's Lent because the forty day observance began the day after St. Martin's feast day. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the season of Advent was reduced to the four weeks we have now.

As I shared with you these past couple of Sundays, the season of Advent has two themes to it. The first anticipates the second coming of Jesus at the end of time as Judge of heaven and earth. The second theme of Advent is our celebration of the events surrounding our savior's birth on Christmas morning. The color of Advent is violet, sometimes with a blueish hue to differentiate with the violet associate with Lent, a more reddish violet. The color violet can be associated with that time after the darkest part of night when hints of the approach of dawn can be seen in the eastern sky. And so, violet in the advent sense can be a color of hope that the second coming of Christ our light is nearing the horizon.

Midway through Advent and Lent, there are Sundays set aside to accentuate that defiant hope. Today is one of them. Today is Gaudete Sunday where everything from our readings, the candle we lit in our Advent wreath, to the rose vestment that I am wearing accentuates our joy that the light of Christ is victorious over the darkness in our world.

Isaiah points to this in the first reading, doesn't he? “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.” St. Paul says it clearly in the second reading, doesn't he? “Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always!” This is what St. Paul challenges us to do this Sunday: “Rejoice always! In all circumstances give thanks. Do not quench the Spirit! Refrain from any kind of evil.” And in our Gospel reading, we have St. John the Baptist testifying to the light so that all might believe and be joyful that Christ our light is dawning on the horizon.

Christians, what is the moral of this feast day? Here we are in the darkest time of year and the Church is reminding us that God created us to be joyful. Joy is a gift from God, but it is a gift God will not force us into using. Joy is also a choice. Joy is also a choice. We have to cooperate with God's grace by how we form our attitudes and how we deal with the world around us.

Now, as I have shared with you before, I personally think that happiness and joyfulness can be distinguished as two different emotions, don't you think? Webster's dictionary won't do this for you, but I think we all can tell the difference. We can feel a moment of happiness at times and still not be joyful people. We can also be sad at times, even filled with grief, but nevertheless, at

the heart of our being, of who we are, can still be joyful people. I think happiness is a feeling we get and joy is more like an attitude of the soul. Do you follow me?

For example, we all know people who have every reason to be unhappy, but yet are joyful people. We know who these people are. I have met with elderly with all kinds of physical ills. I have met with children abandoned by their parents. I have met with families in poverty. I have met with patients with incurable diseases who nevertheless, at the heart of their being, are joyful people. You see it in their eyes. We might be calling to mind these people in our heads right now. Joy is a gift but, but ask yourself, how often is joy a choice?

On the other hand, I have also met people who have every material thing imaginable, surrounded by a loving family, and yet still find a way to be miserable. I know people who throw their whole families away, not because of any real problems going on, but because they just don't feel quote unquote "happy". Of course, what happens is, their search for quote unquote "happiness" leads them head long into profound misery, dragging everyone else with them. You see, instead of futilely trying to find what our culture defines as "happiness", what they really need to be doing is choosing the joy Christ freely gives us and the satisfaction that brings.

Meanwhile, you kids are not off the hook! On Christmas morning, there will be children in Woodinville who will not receive many presents at all, but will be joyful for what they have and even more joyful about the gifts they will give. There will also be children in Woodinville who will receive enough presents to make Toys R Us stocks jump, and they will still find a reason to be unsatisfied and unhappy, missing the whole point.

You see, my friends, real happiness, real joy, comes from within. Let me say that again. Real happiness, real joy, comes from within. That is where God gives it to us, from within. That is where all potentiality resides, from within. And indeed, there is much work involved. We must choose, we must decide, we must commit daily to an attitude of being joyful. God gives us the gift, but we must be courageous enough to open and use this gift by the decisions and attitudes we adopt. Joy has nothing to do with what our economic status is. Joy has nothing to do with even what our health is. Joy is a characteristic of a healthy soul in an unhealthy world. Joy loves more and seeks less. Joy is a gift, to be sure. Joy, however, is also a choice.

This is why, during the darkest time of year when the weather couldn't be nastier, the Church marches the priest out into the sanctuary wearing a rose garment, we light a rose colored candle, and the readings and prayers of the liturgy call us to choose the joy Jesus Christ offers us. One could almost call this liturgy a protest, a defiant statement, and the right medicine the soul needs this time of year.

And so, let's ask the simple and yet not so simple question: Am I a joyful person? Am I a joyful person? The challenge this week is to look around us and count all the reasons why we should be joyful. And if you can't count enough reasons, create some, choose it. We are here because we know Jesus alone can

offer us true joy. Jesus alone is light in our darkness. Jesus alone washes us clean of our sins. Jesus alone will welcome us into everlasting life. And so we have therefore lit the third candle of Advent. Rejoice always, again I say to you: rejoice!