

## **Third Sunday of Advent (A): The Reasons for Rejoicing!**

Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10; Psalm 146:6-7,8-9,9-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Parish,

Greetings of joy in the Lord!

We turn our attention to the invitation to rejoice on this third Sunday of Advent. We called this Sunday "Gaudete Sunday" from the first word of the entrance antiphon in the Latin original, Gaudete, which means "Rejoice!" This invitation to rejoice should cause us a particular interest. With our pressing problems, the never-ending sad news, the challenges of inflation, mortgages, paying recurring bills or tuition fees, family issues, and what have you? Who of us wouldn't appreciate the joy in our lives? But what would be the source of our joy?

We all have mixed attitudes and expectations about rejoicing, just like the people of old had mixed expectations about the coming of the Messiah.

The people of old shared the same longing for God's redeeming act, but they had mixed expectations of how this redeeming act will happen. Some expected a warrior king, a liberator of Israel, and a vengeful messiah; others looked for a merciful God who would strengthen the feeble and the weak and comes with vindication to save his people (see Isaiah 34; 63:1-6; Isaiah 35:3-4). On the other hand, John the Baptist, praised by our Lord as the greatest of all the prophets, expected a decisive judgment of the Messiah. He expected that if a person does not repent and does not bring forth fruits of righteousness will be like chaff burned with unquenchable fire. Now that he was already in prison, and seemed uncertain because he did not see it happening. He wanted evidence to prove Jesus as the Messiah. We heard his inquiry by sending his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the One who is to come, or do we have to wait for another?" (Mat 11:3).

Jesus' response draws our attention to ponder on the manifestations or the signs of the presence of the Messiah. He presents the signs the prophet Isaiah mentioned, "the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hears, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mat 11:4-5). God's redeeming act is manifested or expressed through the various healings and proclamation of the good news to the poor. We know, in faith, that while John looked for a decisive judgment with the Messiah destroying sinners by fire, Jesus conquered sin and saved the sinners by his death. His defeat is his victory! We know, in faith, that God desires to save and change people's lives, not through condemnation but through mercy. Who will not rejoice in this good news?

However, some people may have difficulty relating to the invitation to rejoice, especially when they are under the shadows of troubles and sorrows of life. The lyrics of the song the Lord of the Dance, (604, verse 4) express this difficulty. It says, "It is hard to dance with the devil on your back." Yes, it would be difficult to rejoice amid misfortune, illness, or death in the family. Aside from these sad realities, we sometimes deal with difficult people with negative attitudes that spoil our day. While it is difficult, it doesn't mean rejoicing has no place at all.

Joy is a gift of Jesus. He once said to those who are in trouble, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mat 11:28). He promised to give rest, and the gift of "rest" is also the gift of joy because rest is being filled with his presence, that he is with us!

Joy is not the absence of pain and sorrow; it is being filled with gratitude and contentment, which are part of God's indwelling in the lives of those who trust him. We who come to the Holy Mass do not deny nor forget the pains and sorrows of life but offer them to God. These are the offerings we bring along with the material gifts in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Amen!

The passage from the letter of James adds to the wisdom of joy. He tells us to be patient like a farmer who waits for the fruit of the work of his hands, trusting in God's intervention and providence (cf. James 5:7). It is to imitate

the patience of a farmer who silently journeys through the cycle of season and waits for the harvest. St. Teresa of Avila believes in the effectiveness of patience. Hence it is the title of her poem "La eficacia de paciencia" or the Effectiveness of Patience. She wrote: "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you, everything passes, God never changes. Patience empowers everything; who has God lacks nothing, God alone suffices."

Patience is one of the spiritual virtues we need most because there are many spoilers of joy; they come either in small or bundles, persons, or events. If I have a dog or cat, I will probably name them paciencia or paciencioso to constantly remind me of this virtue.

Discernibly, part of our joy is being aware of the loving presence of God in our ordinary lives. We answer the invitation to rejoice by prayerfully remembering that God entered into our time and space through a remote place, in a manger, too isolated and unknown that even ordinary people could not believe it happened. We answer the invitation to rejoice by pondering anew the drama of God's saving action from the birth of Jesus to his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, which the people of old could only long for or dream of. We answer the invitation to rejoice by reminding ourselves again and again that Jesus is the true God, who dwelt among us, that he is fully human and became one of us except sin, and continues his saving actions through his Church, perpetually present and generously feeding us through the Holy Eucharist.

Rejoice!

Fr. Manny Hewe  
Pastor

### **Prayer for Joy**

St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

"Grant me, O Lord, good digestion and also something to digest.

Grant me a healthy body and the necessary good humor to maintain it.

Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil but instead finds the means to put things back in their place.

Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumblings, sighs, and laments,  
nor excess of stress because of that obstructing thing called "I."

Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor.

Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke to discover in life a bit of joy,  
and to be able to share it with others."