

Third Sunday of Advent B - Rejoice in the Lord always. Indeed the Lord is near!
December 13, 2020.

From the news, it seems the COVID 19 active cases and deaths are increasing, not decreasing, not even stabilizing. Hope the vaccines can stop the spread. Many people have to go for test and are anxious and worried while waiting and not knowing. Brothers and sisters, yes, there are times that we feel lost and alone. There are many times we have anxiety and worry. It seems the Lord is not answering our calls. But we are not lost, we are not alone. He is with us. **With Jesus in our lives, the crises we face become challenges, but not devastating events.** A loved one becomes sick, or even dies. We become sick and receive diagnosis that is terminal. A marriage falls apart. A job is lost. Bankruptcy. Whatever the crisis, we know that the final result will be union with God. **Jesus is with us always, particularly in the worst of our times. Rejoice in the Lord.** As St. Francis of Assisi said: **By the anxieties and worries of this life, Satan tries to dull a person's heart and make a dwelling for himself there. Be more positive. Don't let Satan make our hearts his dwelling place.**

John the Baptist proclaims in the Gospel the coming of the Messiah: **"there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."** (John 1:19-28) To be fair, that would take some time for the Jews 2000+ years ago to digest, because for them the Messiah would come as a King in power and glory. But for us Christians today, we know that Our Saviour is already in virgin Mary's womb, about to be born. He is already among us, but hidden, waiting to be revealed. **This week we can celebrate the moment of salvation history when Mary becomes pregnant and Jesus 'birthday draws near.** As St Lucy whose feast day is today said, **"Those whose hearts are pure are temples of the Holy Spirit."**

This Sunday's first reading, from the third section of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (61:1-2A, 10-11) which Jesus Himself read when he started his public ministry: **Jesus's first sermon. "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God."** (Luke 4: 18-19) As Christians, we are anointed by God. We are baptized. And we are sent to bring joy to the world. We are to bring glad tidings to the poor, through His people here on earth, the Church. We are to tell the broken-hearted that God hears their cries. If they are mourning the loss of a loved one, they need to hear that the Lord has conquered death and that those who welcome Him into their lives will live with Him forever. If their hearts are broken because of events like job loss, broken marriage, loved one died, or anything that make them feel abandoned, alone, they need to know that **Jesus is the Physician Divine and Healer of Broken Hearts. With Jesus we can be victors, not victims.**

In year 2000, at the 15th World Youth Day, our Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II told youths to be attuned to the presence of Christ in their inmost desires. His words were meant for us too: **"It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else ever satisfies you. He is the beauty to which you are so attracted. It is He who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise. It is He that urges you to shed the masks of a false life. It is He who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs up in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an**

ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.” (Page 4, Address of HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II at the Vigil of Prayer, Tor Vergata, Saturday, 19 August 2000).

This Sunday is also Gaudete Sunday, Rejoice Sunday. “Brothers and sisters,” St. Paul says in the second reading (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24), **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”** As Jesus concluded his earthly ministry and was about to leave, he says, **“These things I have spoken to you that my joy might be in you and your joy be complete,”** (John 15:11). Christian joy is not something money can buy. It is more than a smile on a happy face. It is much deeper. It comes from an awareness that God is with us and it produces a contentment and an inner peace that cannot be taken away from us. Friendship with God is the source of Christian joy. Anxieties want to shift Our Lord from us, but we mustn't let them. No trial can drown this joy since it is born of faith. We have the joyful duty to proclaim to the world about the goodness of God. **There is more to Advent than an early “Merry Christmas!”** We have every reason to be joyful. ***Rejoice, not so much that we have found Christ, but rejoice that He has found us and is with us.*** Now, the whole focus of our lives has changed. With Jesus in our lives, we are mature adults, living in His Love. **Rejoice in the Lord.** It is up to us to lead people to the victory of Jesus Christ. We do this by sharing our joy with them. **“I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul.”** I was lost, but now I am found. **We were all lost, but He found us. His Grace is Amazing.**

Yes, this Advent can sure be a time of anxiety because of the pandemic. There's still many traditional Christmas stuffs to do: decorations, Christmas cards, baking... But remember, **Advent is also a time of expectation and preparation for the Christmas feast as well as for the second coming of Christ.** As a Member of the Knights of Columbus, I have a mission to proclaim ***Keep Christ in Christmas.*** That's not just a public awareness campaign; it's a spiritual call to arms. The Reason for the season is what maintains our joyous expectation. Our Lord didn't say we'd be free of difficulties, but that he would overcome them: ***“In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33).

Rejoice in the Lord always. Indeed the Lord is near! How can we be anything other than positive? Rejoice!