

Advent III 2020, December 13, 2020

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8,19-28, Psalm 126, *or* Canticle 15 (or 3)

The Third Sunday of Advent has several titles that tell us a great deal about the theology behind our selections of readings we're about to hear.

By many it's called "Gaudete" Sunday from the Latin "Rejoice! Or "Exuberant Joy". That one word should be the one word which describes our who identity and experience as Christians, being so full of bubbling joy, rejoicing that our lives as disciples of Christ are a life of happiness, of being truly loved as we are, lives so transformed by being loved that it overflows and spills out from us to all those around us.

That joy of being alive of being loved and loving everyone around us, God and our neighbor should lead us to a deep and profound sense of gratitude.

Unfortunately, life in this world is often dark, lonely, and sometimes painful. But even in darkness, we somehow hang onto that that sense of rejoicing in the light. "Rejoicing in all circumstances".

We have to ask ourselves a really tough question, here does our Christianity bring people and ourselves and "Up to Joy" or does it bring people "Down in judgement unhappiness"? They say about the Puritan Christians that "A Puritan's greatest fear is that someone, somewhere, is having a good time."

Isn't that exactly what so many non-Christians think of our religion? No dancing, no drinking no swearing, no laughing. Where's the Christian joy to be seen in telling everyone that everything that brings them joy will send them to some sadistic hell?

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating a life of Hedonism masked by some veneer of fake Christianity. No, I'm talking about a joy and gratitude that is so deep within us in the very core of our existence that it shines out from us, even when we don't feel it. Rejoice, again, I say Rejoice!

Our Old Testament reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah is very familiar to us as Christians because of the first time Jesus climbed up in the synagogue pulpit and read from the Bible to us, he read this passage. Hearing the author read his own writing is a great privilege to us as listeners. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" God anointed me to bring news of exuberant joy

As you listen to these familiar words, I'd ask you to allow the 1st person present tense confusion to guide you to a new understanding. Is the reading talking about the spirit of God being upon the prophet Isaiah, or Jesus? Or you personally. There's no doubt it was about Isaiah when he wrote it down. But talking about a future Jesus. But I would recommend, as disciple of Jesus who are instructed to imitate Jesus in our lives, in fact, to be Jesus in this world, that this reading should be our mission statement. At your Baptism, the spirit came down on you and you were anointed and sent into this dark, hurting, it lost world to proclaim joy. It isn't about someone

else, it's a prophecy about you to share the wonderful good news with others, especially the opposed to bind up the brokenhearted, We have to liberate people from their imprisonments. You in your exuberant rejoicing are called to comfort those who mourn, giving out garlands' rather than ashes. If we're doing Christianity and religion the right way, these dark things like grieving, fear, brokenhearted ness won't bring us down but build others up so that their whole being will exult in life as much as it does in ours.

St. Paul is going to echo this reminder of the sheer joy of our Christianity when he tells us: "Rejoice always and be grateful in every circumstance of life"

I've known some family members and some friends who made being a Christian into a dark thing, a life which is never so happy as when its Un-happy, that we should doubt and almost miserable in suffering and depriving ourselves of happiness.

St. Paul tells them "Rejoice! Don't quench the Spirit!"

Then we're going to hear a passage from the Gospel, the Good and wonderful news we're supposed to be giving to people and we get another Sunday of John the Baptist.

It can kind of feel like we were just starting to unclench our Christianity. We're just starting to allow ourselves to embrace the joy and the fun of being a Christian of dancing unself-consciously and we look up and the school principal is towering go over us smacking a ruler in his palm. We probably feel like we're about to get in trouble for having a good time.

I've known a lot of school principals. I've known a lot of frighteningly stern nuns. I've known a lot of scary policemen and almost all of them knew that's just their facad. When you have them over for dinner, give them a couple of glasses of wine, play some music, then you'll find out the Principal is a lovely person. Get a couple drinks in scary Sister Matilda and I swear you'll find she can be hilarious and fun and loving.

I like to think John the Baptist is the same. After all, he too is a disciple of Jesus. John's the first to say "I'm not the Messiah, don't copy me, copy Jesus. He's the messiah, He's God, do whatever he tells you. I just want to make sure you're listening to what he says.

So, let's make sure we've truly listening to what Jesus says. He's God after all. He says "The spirit of God is on you. You have been anointed with an oil that smells wonderful and he wants you to bring joy into people' lives around you.

If they're brokenhearted, help them bind the pieces back together. If they are trampled down by life, help life them up.

If they're trapped in some horrible captivity of additions or abusive relationships, or detention camps, or whatever imprisons them. Don't just stand there and tell them to suck it up and suffer in silence. Life them up, cheer them, free them, love them. Tell them God adores them and never wants them to suffer or be miserable. Tell them God wants them to be free and happy. God wants them to live lives full of exuberant joy and happiness because when we are happy It's

so much easier to say Thank you and live truly grateful lives, looking more at the phenomenal gifts and blessings of life than the hardships.

Only after we do the work of being an alter- Christians. Another Christ can we and them, “Greatly rejoice in God and our whole being exult in God, clothed in the garments and robes of the greatest wedding party ever imagined.

So, on this stir-up Sunday, this rose/pink candle is lit to remind us of the Fun our Christianity should be giving us. Deep within our very being. If it isn’t giving you that joy and sense of rejoicing, then maybe we aren’t doing it right.

If that’s the case, that your religion is making you an unhappy and miserable person, then I still say Rejoice because a true Christian should be with you shortly to free you from that prison. A Christian who will put a garland on your head, love you, and release you from the darkness because that’s what we do, that’s what Christ does so may it be!