

Homily for the third Sunday of Advent Year A

There was a young man who was sick often as a baby. He was very small and weak. As a boy, he was frail and delicate. He could not play sports with other boys his age.

Later, he entered the ministry. His health was very fragile. Because of this, he could not fully serve his growing church. He did not focus on his problems. Instead, his spirit stayed strong. His main complaint was about the hymns of his time. He felt they lacked hope and joy.

Someone challenged him to write better hymns. He accepted the challenge. He wrote more than 600 hymns. Most of them were hymns of praise. In 1748, his health failed completely. By then, he had left behind an amazing collection of hymns. His name was *Isaac Watts*.

In two weeks, we will be singing one of his most famous hymns, *“Joy to the World!”* Isaac Watts discovered joy in his life because he knew that God would never desert him. He was able to live his life with all sorts of health problems, feeling close to God and Jesus. He had joy deep in his heart.

This third Sunday of Advent is called *“Gaudete Sunday”*, which means *“Rejoice.”* On this day the *pink* (rose) candle is lit on the Advent wreath, and the priest may wear *rose-colored* vestments. *The rose color is a sign of joy and hope*, reminding us that the *waiting of Advent is almost over* and *Christmas is near*. **Gaudete Sunday** encourages believers to pause from the spirit of preparation and *rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ*.

On this Third Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to rejoice, not because all problems are solved, but because the Lord is near.

We heard the first reading from the Book of Isaiah. The background is very sorrowful. In the 7th century BC, Israel and Jerusalem were crushed by Assyrian invasion. The people were enslaved. The Temple was destroyed. The people thought, *“Everything is finished”*. It is during that time the prophet Isaiah speaks to a weary people the God’s word: *“It is not over; deliverance is coming. The desert*

shall rejoice and bloom, the weak hands will be strengthened, the blind will see, the lame will walk.”

This is not cheap happiness. It is joy born from God’s promise. Even before everything changes, God assures His people: “I am coming to save you.” Christian joy begins not when problems disappear, but when we trust that God is at work.

In today’s reading from the Letter of James, Christians are encouraged to be patient like a farmer waiting for the fruit of the earth. Fear and worry can make us impatient and harm our relationships, but true joy grows quietly and steadily. *Advent* joy is the same as it requires trust, patience, and hope, even when the outcome is not yet visible.

Finally, in the first part of today’s Gospel reading, Jesus encourages John the Baptist in prison to rejoice by casting away his wrong expectations about the Messiah and simply to accept Jesus’ healing and preaching ministry as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah.

In the second part of today’s Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus, the true Messiah, paying the highest compliments to John the Baptist as his herald and the last of the prophets, and giving special credit to the courage of John’s prophetic convictions, asking his listeners to rejoice in the greatness of his herald.

St. Teresa once said, ***“Joy is prayer; joy is strength.”*** Though she lived among the poorest of the poor, she always wore a smile. When someone asked how she remained joyful in so much suffering, she replied, ***“Because Jesus is close to me in the distressing disguise of the poor.”*** Her joy flowed from loving service and trusting God’s presence.

This Gaudete Sunday reminds us that real joy comes when Christ is welcomed into our daily life, in sharing, forgiving, and serving. Let us Rejoice and let our joy become a sign that God is near. May God bless all of us. Amen.

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