

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent - B  
Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11;  
I Thessalonians 5:16-24;  
John 1:6-8, 19-28  
Little Flower - 12/17/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. Today is commonly called Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* is a Latin word that means rejoice. Instead of violet vestments, today priests wear rose vestments. Instead of a violet Advent candle, today we lit the rose candle.

This Sunday takes its name from the traditional Entrance Antiphon which comes from Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. The Lord is near" [4:4-5]. We rejoice today because we are now at the mid-point of Advent. Christmas is almost here. Just as Paul called the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always, Paul also wrote to the Thessalonians, "*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks...*"

Like last Sunday's Gospel, today's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist. John is once again portrayed as fulfilling the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "*I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"*" Once again, John affirms that he is not the Messiah but the messenger.

The first verses of today's Gospel, from the Prologue of John's Gospel, state that John the Baptist came to testify to the light, i.e., to Jesus. A witness testifies to what he had seen. What John saw and bore witness to was the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and remaining upon him. He, therefore, would testify, "*Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God*" [Jn. 1:34].

Although today's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist, it affirms Jesus' mission to be the light of the world. Twice in John's Gospel Jesus referred to himself as the light of the world. Jesus is the light of the world because as Son of God made human, he reveals God to us and us to ourselves. Jesus is the light of the world because he reconciles us to God, others, the world, and ourselves. Jesus is the light of the world because he is the Good Shepherd who shows us the way and leads us to God by the witness of his life, death, and resurrection. At the same time, Jesus also challenges us: "*You are the light of the world.....your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*" [Mt. 5:14a, 16].

The opening verses of today's first reading are the verses Jesus would choose as his mission statement in Luke's Gospel: "*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 lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners....*" The one outstanding difference between Isaiah 61 and Jesus' citation of Isaiah 61 in Luke is that Jesus omitted the phrase *to heal the brokenhearted*. Although there are different interpretations of why Jesus did this, at least one suggested that Jesus purposely omitted it because he wanted to define his mission in concrete terms.

My brothers and sisters, as Christians, we have to make the mission of Jesus our own. If we bring good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, we will be lights to the world and people who see our good deeds will give glory to God. However, I think Jesus also wanted to link his mission to his criteria for our judgment: "*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me....Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers [or sisters] of mine, you did for me*" [Mt. 25:35-36 & 40].