

3rd Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;
John 1:6-8, 19-28
Little Flower - 12/14/14

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. It comes from the 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. Instead of violet vestments, today priests wear rose vestments. Instead of a violet Advent candle, today we lit the rose candle.

Like last Sunday's Gospel, today's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist. The first verses of today's Gospel define John's mission: "*He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.*" Jesus would later say to his disciples and to us: "*And you too will be witnesses*" [Jn. 15:27a].

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus applied the opening verses of today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah to Himself. Therefore, today's reading from Isaiah could be Jesus' mission statement: "*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 favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.*" By our baptism, but especially by our confirmation, we have been anointed by the Lord and the spirit of God is upon us.

If we are to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus, we have to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving. Above all, Christmas is the great season of joy. Although we are preparing to celebrate Jesus' historical birth, we believe that Jesus now lives within and among us. We believe that he is constantly being reborn in us. If we really believe this, we will be joyful and share joy with others.

As I mentioned on the First Sunday of Advent, as Christians, we are a people of hope. Optimism is born of hope. We believe that tomorrow can and will be better than today because Jesus overcame sin, suffering, sickness, and death not only for Himself but also for us. Paradoxically, we will be optimistic if we also really believe that Jesus wants us to have not only a better tomorrow but also a better today.

Finally, we have to be life giving. When we bring glad tidings to the poor, heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisons, and proclaim a year of favor from the Lord by feeding the physically and emotionally hungry, giving drink to the physically and emotionally thirsty, clothing the physically and emotionally naked, and visiting the physically and emotionally sick and those in physical or emotional prisons, we fulfill Jesus' injunction in Matthew 25: "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me*" [40]. Self-giving, self-sacrificing love is always life-giving.

My brothers and sisters, last Tuesday in his morning homily, Pope Francis said, "The joy of going out to seek the brothers and sisters who are far off: This is the joy of the Church.... The joy of the Church is to give birth; the joy of the Church is to go out of herself to give life..."¹ By our baptism, but especially by our confirmation, we have been anointed by the Lord, and the spirit of God is upon us. In today's second reading, St. Paul emphatically reminds us, "*Do not quench the Spirit.*"

¹Pope Francis, "Church's joy to be a mother," homily on Tuesday, December 9, 2014, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/12/09/pope_francis_churchs_joy_is_to_be_a_mother/1114079.