

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent - C  
Zephaniah 3:14-18a;  
Philippians 4:4-7;  
Luke 3:10-18  
Little Flower - 12/16/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent. Today is often called Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means *rejoice*. At the midpoint of Advent, we are called to "*Rejoice in the Lord always*" because "*indeed, the Lord is near*" [Phil. 4:4-5]. As a sign of rejoicing, priests are invited to put aside the violet vestments of the season and to wear rose vestments.

However, the truth is that the Lord is not only near; he is already here. We talk about the three comings of Christ: his historical birth 2000 years ago, his rebirth in our lives and hearts today, and his future and final coming in glory. The reality is that Jesus is alive and present within and among us. He is present in his Word, especially in the Gospels. He is present in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. He is present in his Spirit living within and among us.

Therefore, as Christians, we are called to rejoice in the Lord always. As Christians we are called to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving. In today's reading from Zephaniah, we heard, "*Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!*" Unfortunately, too often Christians allow themselves to become only prophets of gloom and doom, hell fire and damnation." Fr. Jim Moriarty, my pastor at St. Matthew's, referred to them as "white knuckle" Catholics. He described them as people squeezing the arms of chairs and gritting their teeth while they proclaim the Good News of salvation. We are to rejoice in the Lord always because we believe that Jesus has already won the victory over sin, suffering, sickness, and death—the victory over evil in all its forms. If we do not believe that, we really do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Second, we are called to be optimistic. Again, Zephaniah wrote, "*Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior...*" Christians are a people of hope. Christian hope is the confident awaiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. Although Christians should not be presumptuous, we also should never despair. Christ is present; Christ will come in glory. To translate this into our terms, we are called to live lives of confidence that tomorrow can and will be better than today.

Third, we are called to be life giving. If we are joyful, optimistic, and loving, we will be life-giving. Since most of us are not tax collectors or soldiers, John's words to the crowds are most appropriate for us: "*Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.*" Paul wrote to the Philippians: "*Your kindness should be known to all.*"

My brothers and sisters, on Friday, our nation suffered another devastating tragedy with the deadly shooting of 26 adults and young children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. There is nothing any of us could say or do that would lessen the pain of those directly affected and those who live in that community. What happened was senseless. Therefore, words like *joyful*, *optimistic*, and *life-giving* almost seem out of place after such a tragedy. No one feels joyful, optimistic, or life giving. In their Christian meaning, however, these are not feelings but fundamental attitudes. One of St. Paul's constant themes throughout his writings is that we should support one another in faith, love, and hope. It is in times of tragedy that people most need to draw support from each other's faith, love, and hope. If we put it all together, we come to understand that faith leads to joy, hope leads to optimism, and love is life-giving.