

3rd Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;
John 1:6-8, 19-28
Little Flower - 12/13/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent, commonly called Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* is a Latin word that means rejoice. It comes from today's Entrance Antiphon which itself 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.*"

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus applied the opening verses of today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah to Himself. In other words, today's reading from Isaiah became 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.

As I suggested last Sunday, if we are to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus, we have to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving even in the darkness of the pandemic. Like John, we are called *to testify to the light*, and Christ Himself is that light. Above all, Christmas is the 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 called to be a people of hope. Optimism is born of hope. We believe that tomorrow can and will be better than today. We believe this 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. If we want to share hope and optimism, we have to be alert for the signs of a better today.

Finally, we have to be life giving. We are life giving when we bring glad tidings to the poor, heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, and proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. Self-giving, self-sacrificing love is always life-giving.

My brothers and sisters, in all honesty, I have found it hard to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving during the pandemic. Most of us have known someone who has had coronavirus or have had it ourselves or have known and perhaps loved someone who has died from it. Some of us have lost jobs at least temporarily or have been negatively impacted financially. Some of us are struggling spiritually to experience the presence of God in this darkness or struggling to feel connected to God and/or to the Church. If we are honest, most of us are struggling emotionally and socially. We feel isolated, disconnected, uncertain, and anxious. However, if we strive to see the presence of God with eyes of faith and strive to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving, this will make a difference in the lives of others and in our own lives as well. 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.*"