

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent - C  
Zephaniah 3::14-18a;  
Philippians 4:4-7;  
Luke 3:10-18  
Little Flower - 12/12/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means rejoice. As we reach the mid-point of Advent, the Church invites us to rejoice because our time of preparation, our time of waiting, to celebrate Christ's birth is almost over. One might even say that today marks a shift from waiting to expectation. As a sign that we are rejoicing, the Church invites us to wear rose vestments on the Third Sunday of Advent.

However, this Sunday is also called *Gaudete* Sunday because of the words of Paul in his Letter to the Philippians: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!* Paul's words form the Entrance Antiphon for today both in today's Liturgy and in the pre-Vatican II Liturgy.

During Advent, we prepare to celebrate the three comings of Christ. When we talk about preparing to celebrate the three comings of Christ, we can forget a most important truth. Zephaniah wrote, "*The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior.*" Paul proclaimed to the Philippians, "*The Lord is near.*" In spite of everything going on in our lives and in our world, Christ, our Savior, is already present within and among us. As Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" [Mt. 18:20], "*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age*" [Mt. 28:20]. Jesus is today and always present to us in his Word, in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and in his Spirit living within us and others. Even when we sin, Christ does not abandon us. This is why we should rejoice always.

Besides Christ being present within and among us, Zephaniah prophesied, "*The Lord has removed the judgment against you.*" In other words, God has forgiven us and let go of our sins. Therefore, according to Zephaniah, we should not live in fear, nor should we be discouraged. It seems to me that so many of us are living in fear, especially because of COVID and because of what else is happening around us. It seems to me that so many of us are discouraged by COVID's continued presence among us and by what is happening in our country. Zephaniah challenges us to let go of both the fear and the discouragement. Likewise, even when we have sinned, we should forgive ourselves and let go of our sin just as God has forgiven us.

At the same time, Paul challenges the Philippians to let go of anxiety. He then gives us a formula to let go of anxiety. He wrote, "*...in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, make your requests know to God.*" In other words, when we pray, we acknowledge our dependence upon God. If we acknowledge our dependence upon God through prayer and with thanksgiving, "*then the peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ.*"

Last Sunday's Gospel gave us the big picture look at John the Baptist. Today's Gospel recounts some of his specific teachings that apply his fundamental call to conversion. First, we are told to share our gifts with those who are most in need. Second, we are called to be honest and just in all our dealings with others. Third, we are told not to use our position or power either to enrich ourselves at the expense of others or to take advantage of others. When we live the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus, Jesus' presence, power, and activity in our lives is made real not only in our lives but also in the lives of those whose lives we touch.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Luke wrote that the people were filled with expectation. During this Advent season, are we filled with expectation as we prepare to celebrate the three comings of Christ, or is Advent simply a time to get through to get to Christmas? This Sunday is always one of my favorite Sundays because the presents you bring make the love of Christ within and among us very visible, very real, before our eyes.