

Third Sunday of Advent

Reflection

Tomorrow is Gaudete Sunday. The pink candle on the Advent wreath is lit, the liturgy is joyous, and a festive mood pervades the monastery. What is so magical about this day that arrives each year as daylight wanes and the darkness lengthens? Why are we bid to rejoice (Gaudete) when nature takes us into deepest darkness while we yearn for the dawn? The scripture readings point the way from darkness to Jesus, as we continue our Advent journey with John, Paul and Isaiah as our guides

In John's gospel, the gaunt, desert prophet, the baptizer declares,

I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'

This is the quintessential message of Advent, to prepare, to get ready, to make a highway for the Lord. We need to remove road blocks, to fill in the valleys of our indecision and weakness, to level the mountains of our arrogance and blindness. We choose to endure the long waiting for all things to unfold in God's own time. That sounds like work, interior, soul searching work, the kind of work that leaves us tired and thirsty.

So, it should be easy for us to follow St. Paul's advice,

Do not quench the Spirit. Test everything: retain what is good. Refrain from evil of every kind.

We are advised to drink deeply of God's Spirit abiding within us. Be filled with love and joy, peace and patience, all the strength of the fruits of the Spirit, and all the God-given grace that flows to and fro within this profound relationship, this dynamic Triune Life that abides within us. Today, as on all days, we find joy in Emmanuel.

Paul tells us:

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

In all circumstances give thanks.

Now that's a big order. I am sure that all of us have, at least on one occasion said to our self, "No, I can't rejoice in that; I can't 'be glad about this; there is no joy here." That is precisely when we need to remember that joy, love and awareness of the abiding presence of God are not about our feelings. This is all about choice; our choice; we choose to love, to be joyful, to be awake and aware of God's divine indwelling. Or not.

I want to tell you a story about our beloved Sister Charlotte. A long time ago, when I was doing night duty in the infirmary, Sister Charlotte came into the gathering room around two in the morning. She was pushing her walker with bright green tennis balls on each leg to make it move more smoothly and quietly. She came over and stood beside me as I folded the laundry. She told me that she was not able to sleep and talked a little about the pain that prevented her rest. Then, quite unexpectedly, she reached up, put a hand on each side of my face,

looked me in the eyes and said, “Do you know God sings love songs because of you: God sings love songs because of me?”

God sings love songs because of you—what an outrageously joyous thought. And she had it on good authority because she reached into her walker basket, whisked out a copy of *Good News for Modern Man* and showed me a well-thumbed page in the Book of Zephaniah. Sure enough there it was, “God sings love songs because of you.” On days when loneliness lingered and darkness dragged at her heart, she found reason to rejoice and spread joy knowing that “God sings love songs because of her.

As further encouragement to follow Charlotte’s example and find our strength in the joy of the Lord, the responsorial psalms puts these words of blessed Mary on our lips.

*My soul rejoices in God my savior,
for he has looked upon his lowly servant.
He has mercy on those who stand in awe,
and he fills the hungry with good things.
He has remembered his promise of mercy.*

Indeed, here is cause for deep and lasting joy.

A third message for this Gaudete comes from Isaiah, the Advent saint, who reminds us that God sends glad tidings to each of us and heals our broken hearts. Then we are sent out to do to and for others as God has done over and over again for us. We are sent to be the messengers that Sr. Barbara told us about last week, the messengers announcing that

the kingdom of God is within us. Now, with all this grace and magic surrounding us, how can we keep from singing?

I remember soon after the Mass propers were translated into English, Sister Emmanuel taught us to sing the closing words of this passage from Isaiah. I loved the melody and even now, I sometimes sing it in my heart but, out of mercy, I will just read it to you. The prophet sings:

*I will heartily rejoice in the LORD,
in the Lord is the joy of my soul;
for he has clothed me in a robe of salvation
and wrapped me in a mantle of justice,
like a bride bedecked with her jewels.*

With courageous faith and outrageous hope, we choose to wait for everything –for the valleys to be filled in, for the rough ways to be made smooth, for love songs, for Emmanuel! Choosing to wait, giving the Divine Indwelling and our own life time and space to unfold is the very essence, the magic, the grace of Gaudete.

*May the God of Peace make you completely whole.
May you entirely, body, mind, and spirit,
be preserved blameless
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is faithful.*

Gaudete in the abiding presence of our God who comes, comes, ever comes. Amen