

Advent III B 2008

LESSON: Christ Brings the Deepest Joy

Today is "Gaudete Sunday."

- ? The word "gaudete" is Latin for "rejoice," and in the Latin version of today's Mass, it's the **very first word**.
- ? The liturgy for every Mass begins with a short verse from the Bible, called the "**entrance antiphon**."
- ? That verse can also be substituted by a **hymn**, but in the official liturgical books, every Mass begins with an entrance antiphon.
- ? The third Sunday of Advent has been "Gaudete Sunday" ever since the time of Pope St Gregory the Great, in the sixth century [original Catholic Encyclopedia].
- ? It's the reason for the **rose-colored** vestments and Advent candle.

Why is the Church inviting all believers to rejoice at the **midpoint** of Advent?

Because Christ's coming to earth, which Advent **looks forward** to, is the **only** source of the true, lasting joy.

Joy is the deep **satisfaction** experienced whenever we come into possession of something **good**.

- ? But all the good things **in this world**, apart from God, are **temporary** and **fragile**.
- ? Money, success, health, even friendship and being in love - all these things are **limited** – and the financial "crisis" we are experiencing this now makes this extremely clear.
- ? If **circumstances** change or enough **time** passes, we either become **tired** of them, or **they go away**.
- ? And so, the joy that comes from possessing them is only a **temporary** joy.

But our hearts are **thirsty** for a joy that will **never** go away, because that's what we were created for.

- ? Our **deepest desire** is to be known and loved **completely**, unconditionally and **everlastingly**, by another person.
- ? Only **God** can fulfill that desire.
- ? But original sin cut this world off from friendship with God, and so the human heart was **stranded**.
- ? On Christmas Day, two thousand years ago, God **came to our rescue**.
- ? And now, because of Christ, the **true, lasting** joy that each one of us desires more than anything else, is possible.

That's why the Entrance Antiphon doesn't just say, "Rejoice." It says, "Rejoice **in the Lord**."

ILLUSTRATION: Kick or Kiss?

This is why our friendship with Christ is worth **more than anything** - more than our comfort, our freedom, and even our very lives.

During the recent Synod of Bishops in Rome [October 2008], one of the Bishops shared a story about this.

- ? He explained that in **Latvia**, the northern European country he is from, the Soviet communists forcibly imposed their communist rule after World War II.
- ? Part of their policy was the systemic **elimination of all religion**.
- ? So they arrested Protestant pastors, as well as Catholic priests and bishops, intimidated them, bribed them, and did everything they could to **cut off the flow of grace**.
- ? They also made it a **crime** to possess the Bible, which was considered an anti-Communist (and therefore **treasonous**) book.
- ? One priest who was arrested for possessing the Bible was named **Viktors**.
- ? When they arrested him, the Soviet agents **threw the Holy Scriptures on the floor**, right in front of the priest.
- ? Then they ordered the priest **to step on it** as a sign of **scorn** for the Christian faith.
- ? But the priest **refused**.
- ? Instead, he **knelt down** and **kissed** the sacred book.
- ? For doing this, he was condemned to **10 years of hard labor** in Siberia.
- ? Ten years later, when Viktors returned to his parish and celebrated the holy Mass, he **read the Gospel**.
- ? Then he **held up the lectionary** and said, "The Word of God!"
- ? The parishioners **cried** and **thanked God** in the **silence** of their hearts - they did not dare to applaud him, because that would be taken as another provocation.

That priest understood that the **only lasting joy** in life, the **only thing worth living for**, is **friendship with Jesus Christ**, which is nourished by God's inspired Word, and **nothing** was going to make him **compromise** that.

APPLICATION: Rejoicing Always

Joy, remember, is the deep **satisfaction** that comes from possessing something good.

- ? The good thing we possess as Christians is the special awareness that God is always **with us**, **knows** us thoroughly, and **loves** us without hesitation.
- ? Keeping that awareness **fresh** keeps our joy **strong**, even when life's trials seem to be **crucifying** us.
- ? And the **only** way to keep that awareness fresh is through **prayer**.

That's why right **after** the Second Reading tells us, "rejoice always," it says, "**pray without ceasing.**"

That doesn't mean that we have to spend **all day** on our knees.

But it does mean that we have to spend **some time alone with God** every day,

- ? closing the door to life's **hustle and bustle** for ten or fifteen minutes,
- ? reading and reflecting on the **Bible** or another good spiritual book,
- ? and speaking **heart to heart** with our Creator and Lord.

And then, throughout the day, we have to **keep that conversation going** in our hearts.

There are many little things we can do to help this **ongoing conversation**, to **remind** ourselves of Christ's loving presence in our lives:

- ? use a Bible quote as a **screen saver** on our computer;
- ? put a **favorite religious image** inside our locker, at our work station, on our iPhone;
- ? carry a **rosary** or wear a **crucifix or scapular...**
- ? During Advent it's **especially** easy to do this, because we are surrounded by so many **reminders** of Christmas - lights, trees, ornaments, all of which are symbols of Christ, the **reason** for our joy.

In a few minutes, through the sacrifice of this holy Mass, Christ will **renew his total commitment** to us, the **source** of our lasting joy.

When he does, let's promise that for the next ten days we will make an **extra effort** to "pray without ceasing" so that we will be able to "rejoice always," as he wants us to.