

3rd Sunday of Advent A – December 16, 2007

LESSON: Christ Is the Source of True Joy

We just heard the word "joy", in one form another, **six times**.

Do you think God is trying to tell us something?

We have put away our **dark** vestments today; we have **traded** our purple vestments for **rose vestments**.

Do you think the Church is trying to tell us something?

The **dark night** in which the world **waited helplessly** for its Savior is **coming to an end**; Christmas is drawing **closer**; Christ will soon be born.

- ? Christ himself is the **sun** that lights up the **dark night sky**, and he is **drawing near**; the horizon is beginning to glow with a pale, **rose-colored** light.
- ? The rose vestments are a **visual echo** of the **words** of the First Reading, which **called us to rejoice**.
- ? Today is "Gaudete" Sunday, the Sunday of **Rejoicing**.

But can we really talk about joy in the midst of today's world? After all, the world is **still flooded** with sin.



- ? Every day the news reports about **death** in Iraq, **violence** in the Middle East, **genocide** in Africa, natural **disasters** in Asia and South America.
- ? Every day **thousands of babies** are killed by **abortion**, innocent women and children are sold into **slavery** on the black market, people who seem to have everything plunge into despair and commit **suicide**.

Isn't it **selfish and foolish** to rejoice in the middle of such a **suffering world**?

Not at all.

- ? We do not rejoice because we believe Jesus came to bring **heaven down to earth**.
- ? Rather, we rejoice because we know that Jesus came to **open a path from earth into heaven**.
- ? The joy of the Christian is the joy of a **hope** guaranteed by **God himself**. This is **true joy**, the joy of **hope**, and **Christ is its source**.

Quoting Pope Benedict, *“To transform the world, God chose a humble young girl from a village in Galilee, Mary of Nazareth, and challenged her with this greeting: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” In these words lies the secret of an authentic Christmas. God repeats them to the Church, to each one of us: Rejoice, the Lord is close! With Mary’s help, let us offer ourselves with humility and courage so that the world may accept Christ, who is the source of true joy.”* (Angelus address, Third Sunday of Advent, 2005)

ILLUSTRATION: The Church Is Incontrovertible Evidence for Joyful Hope

This joyful hope is not **blind**. There is incontrovertible **evidence** behind it.

One piece of this evidence is the **Church** itself.

For **two thousand years**, the **Catholic Church** has continued to **grow and spread** into every culture and corner of the world.

And in spite of this incredible **growth**, it has kept completely **intact** the same **faith**, sacraments, and hierarchical structure that it **started** with.

- ? Any Catholic from **any** place or time could pick up **our** Catechism, read it, and say, “That’s exactly what I believe.” **Our** Creed is the **same** Creed prayed by the Emperor **Constantine**.
- ? If we were transported back to the **catacombs** in the year **200**, we could go to **Mass** there and feel right at home, because we celebrate **that same Mass** today. Only the **language** and the **frills** have changed.
- ? When **St Patrick** went to Christianize the pagan **Irish** in the 400s, it was because the **pope**, the bishop of Rome, had **authorized** him to do so. Today, **our** bishop, Bishop Rhoades, successor of the Apostles, is serving the diocese of Harrisburg only because he was **appointed** by that **same** bishop of Rome, the pope.



Think of how unlikely this **amazing continuity** really is. If it were merely a **human** institution, it would be **impossible**.

If it were merely a **human** institution, long ago it would have **caved in** under the constant pressure of **corruption and cowardice** that has plagued it from the time of Judas himself. But it **hasn't**.

- ? Is there any **other institution** in history that has not only **preserved** itself but **continued** to grow, expand, and adapt over such a **long** period of time?
- ? The United States hasn't even been around for **300** years, and **already** our Constitution is being twisted around like a **pretzel** to make it say things it **never** said - for example,



that **unborn babies** have no human rights, or that religion is to have NO role in society – that you can't say "Merry Christmas" or call it "Christmas Vacation" or display a manger scene on the courthouse lawn...

The Church itself is **proof** that a Christian's **joyful hope** is not blind, but **grounded** in the truth of God.

APPLICATION: Setting Up the Manger Scene

It is **not hard** to let this spirit of true joy **brighten** up our lives these days, as Christmas comes closer.

Even though **consumerism** has learned to **take advantage** of this season in many places, it has done so by **surrounding** us with **decorations, images, and music** that can serve as **excellent reminders** of the **truth** that Christ has **come to live among us** - the truth that is the **source** of Christian joy.

- ? The evergreen **wreaths** and Christmas **trees** (which have begun to appear even here in church) are a symbol of God's **undying love, always green and fresh**, even in the middle of **darkest, coldest** winter.
- ? The **lights** and **glittering bulbs** remind us that **Christ's light** came to **conquer the darkness** of sin and ignorance, and that it will **always continue to shine, leading** us to true happiness.



But above all, the **manger scenes** that abound this time of year **vividly** portray the most **amazing fact** in human history:

- ? God actually became a human being.
- ? He was actually **born once** as Mary's little baby, so that by our **faith** in him **we** could be born **again** as **children of God**.
- ? The **manger in Bethlehem**, in fact, is the **reality** that all the other symbols **point** to.



In many places of the world, Catholics have a **long tradition** of **setting up their family manger scenes** right after celebrating the Immaculate Conception, as we were reminded by Pope Benedict, quoted in the bulletin 2 weeks ago. We Catholics have this long-standing tradition:

- ? "as if to **relive with Mary** those days full of trepidation that preceded the birth of Jesus" (Pope Benedict XVI,

Angelus, Third Sunday of Advent, 2005).

- ? It's a **good tradition**, one that can help all of us live these days more profoundly and joyfully.

Today, as **Christ renews his presence** among us in the Eucharist, let's promise that as we approach the celebration of Christmas, we will **let that presence bring joy to our hearts** - true joy, the kind that **only Christ** can give.

