

Gaudete Sunday

Rejoice always in the Lord

This is St Paul's central message of this third Sunday of Advent

Although these may have had more meaning in earlier times

When Advent was more of a penitential time

It still retains this meaning

The rose candle and rose vestments are worn

We are about halfway through this time of anticipation

And we are called to recall who it is we are waiting for

Something all of us need

**Because it is all too easy to get caught up in the secular meaning
of Christmas**

The gifts and the cards

The parties and family gatherings

The baking and decorating

As great as these are

They are peripheral to the true meaning of Christmas

To allow him to enter

We have to make room

So we ask a question today:

Who am I?

Who are we as a local community?

Who are we as a greater church?

It isn't a response to another at a party

Hi, I am ...

It is a question that asks us to reveal the foundation of our identity

The essence of who we are

It goes beyond our name

Beyond our country of origin

Beyond what we do for a living

It is not a political identification

It is something that people of all ages have struggled with in one way or another

And it can be...

It probably should be an uncomfortable, difficult question to answer

In their own way the ancient Israelites asked this question

And they had their answer

They were God's Chosen People

They were here to be God's messengers to the world

Showing how He cared for all by how He cared for them

Among the gods there is none like you, Lord;

No deeds can compare with yours.

For you are great and do marvelous deeds;

You alone are God. (Ps 86)

But they did not have a smooth path

They were constantly being overrun

Taken captive

Returned to Jerusalem

The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians

This is what Isaiah is helping them recall

And 500 years later, at the time of Christ's birth

They are still waiting for their Messiah

In all of these things

The powers of the world are thwarted by God

The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians

At the time of Christ it is the Romans

The great worldly powers

Defeated one by one

Not by the sword

But by God Himself

Mark tries to answer this question with his Gospel

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The *Evangelium*- the Good news

Caesar was ruling when Mark wrote his Gospel

And he wrote it in Rome

Caesar's center of power

He even used the same word Caesar used

When telling of a great battle won

Evangelium – the good news of Caesar’s army

Mark understood who he was

And he was telling the people of Rome about his God

He was a follower of Jesus Christ

And Jesus Christ has defeated the world

The Roman army had killed Jesus Christ

But he rose in the power of God

Caesar had killed his friends Peter and Paul

But he could not touch their spirit

The powers of the world have been defeated

Not that they would simply go away

They continue even to our own day

Worldly power

For governments, for corporations and for individuals

Taking various forms, but seeking the same thing

Seeking to enslave the human spirit

Bringing us to ask ourselves

Who am I?

Who are we?

I came across this story that might help understand

Long ago there was a monastery that was very influential

Flourishing in every way

Then it began to lose its place

Members left, the gardens fell to neglect

Prayer was neglected, no one came to join

So the Abbot sought the advice of a wise hermit

He spoke of the once vibrant monastery

And of the current conditions

After hours of this, the wise hermit told him

I am going to tell you one thing

No questions

You must do the same with your monks

My dear brother, Jesus Christ is living in your monastery

The Abbot did not comprehend, but adhered to his agreement

He went home and gathered his monks:

My dear brothers,

The wise hermit has one word for us

Jesus Christ is living in our Abbey

The monks did not understand either

But they began to discuss it

If he is here, who is he?

So at their liturgies

If he is here, I had better sing in case he is next to me

In their refectory

If he is here, the food has to be prepared better

In the garden

If he is walking through

We had better weed and water the plants

Get the fences mended and the grounds looking nice

I have to treat my brother better

Just in case it is him

The entire monastery changed

It once again flourished

People returned

My friends

Who are we?

Who am I?

Christ is here among us

In our families, our parish, our community, our world

Do I recognize him?

Is he recognized in me?

In my actions, my words, my choices?

Am I trying to make myself Jesus to others?

Or am I trying to make Jesus into myself?

This Advent

If we can little by little open our minds and hearts to Christ

Becoming him to others

At work, in school, at the store

Then we will truly have reason to rejoice always

This Advent and all year long

Simple things to identify who we are

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