

Rejoice always in the Lord, St Paul tells us

Again, rejoice!

On this third Sunday of Advent

Gaudete Sunday

We are called to rejoice

For the time of our Lord's visitation draws near

This is our invitation today

Even in the midst of all the disruption in the world

Rejoice

But wait a minute...

I had a Christmas party last week

My spouse's is next week

The in-laws are coming to town on Thursday

I am not even half done with my shopping

The Christmas concerts for the kids

The baking

And what about all the crazy stuff in the world?

Not only in Washington DC

North Korea

The middle East, Africa

What's going on in the Holy Land

And I am to rejoice?

Yes, rejoice

That is the Christian response to all this and more

Personal health crisis

Accidents

The reality is that as tough as life can get at times

God has clothed us with a robe of salvation

He heals our broken hearts, our bondage, our poverty

There is really only one thing that should disturb our peace of heart

And that is losing our relationship with the Lord

All these other things can be an invitation

An invitation to a deeper prayer life

A deeper faith life

Knowing all things are in the hands of God

Even when we struggle to recognize it

But it has always been this way

Isaiah was sent to the Israelite nation

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 was their Advent

500 years after Isaiah

They were still waiting for their Messiah

We see this in salvation history

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

This is what Mark is telling us in his Gospel

When Caesar would win a major military battle

He would announce this victory throughout his empire

Evangelium- the good news of Cesar

Mark used this same word to announce his Gospel

The Good News of Jesus Christ

Mark was telling the people of Rome

In the capital city of the Roman Empire

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,

Even the recent sexual abuse and harassment claims

They all seek the same thing

They seek to enslave the human spirit

To tempt us to lose confidence in the Lord's victory

We see how easy it is to lose our focus

So we need to learn to listen to the word that is John the Baptist

For the voice is Jesus Christ
The Baptist tells us the most important things in this life
Are the spiritual truths
The assurance of God's love for me
And his desire to grant us his abundant mercy and forgiveness
He tells us that He is the one to come
We do not need to look for another
We have been redeemed
And he calls us again to awaken our hearts to his grace
Our eyes and ears to His presence
The past is past
There is a new life lying in store
A life with and in Jesus Christ
John called many to him in the desert
The Church continues to call and invite millions to Christ
Our Church is not something relegated to the past
It is a living organism that grows each week
Each day
As our hearts grow in relationship with Him
The power of the Cross and Resurrection will never be exhausted
It is as fresh as that 1st Easter morning
Calling us to new life

But to get there He first has to be born in our hearts

He 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, listen to the word of the Baptist

Opening our hearts and minds to the voice of Christ

Becoming Christ to others

At work, in school, at the store

Then we will truly have reason to rejoice always

This Advent and all year long

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