

**B - December 13, 2020 - Third Sunday of Advent**  
**Deacon Steve Livingston**

Well ... today we turn the corner of Advent. It is Gaudete Sunday. In the lingo of the workplace, it is “hump day”. Advent is half over. And the theme that runs through our readings today *is* Gaudete ... Latin for ... “**REJOICE**”. Isaiah proclaims “... *I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul ...!*” Our psalm recalls Mary’s declaration of joy: “... my spirit **rejoices** in God my Savior ...!” And, finally, Paul commands: “...Rejoice always!” All of these call us to rejoice over what God has done for us ... what He continues to do for us ... and what He yet promises ... to do for us.

Sometimes this rejoicing does not come easy ... especially in a year when it seems like good news is rare. Hundreds of thousands have died in this global pandemic and others have had their lives totally upended. We pick up our local newspaper or listen to the news ... with a certain amount of dread. Many have situations within family or workplace that cause pain and sorrow. It can also be hard to rejoice when ... with the coming of the Christmas season ... our consumerist culture tries to convince us that joy is really in the chaos of getting out there ... or going online ... and buy, buy, buy .... This culture of the world also seems to be trying hard to minimize and de-emphasize Christ in the Christmas event. It is then perhaps time to remind ourselves where true Christian joy lies and just what it is we have to be joyful about.

Certainly, there is some **temporary** joy... that comes with material things ... the stuff we all tell ourselves “If I just had a **whatsis** ... how happy I’d be! And we get it ... and we’re happy ... for a couple minutes ... or a couple days ... or a couple weeks ... but ... sooner or later the **whatsis** ... is forgotten and we move on to the next ... If I only had a ....! Better, of course, is the joy that comes from basking in the company of a loved one but even this is fleeting. These are other moments of joy that accompany the more positive occurrences in our lives and that last for only a while. But, is there a more permanent joy? Is there a joy that is not dependent on ...other things ... other events ... other people? Is there a joy that lasts no matter what the external circumstances? For the Christian ... all real joy completely, totally comes from the gratitude for ... the love of ... and the complete total trust in Christ!

The Christian ... of course ... experiences the joy of the anticipation of the rapidly approaching celebration of our annual memorial of Christ’s birth 2000 + years ago. And, of course, much of that joy comes from the gratitude for all that happened in the ... rest of **that** story that began with His birth ...

all that He taught us ... His death ... His resurrection ... the very gift so freely given ... of our redemption itself.

Christian joy also comes from learning that when we let God into our lives ... our priorities shift. We discover that true joy does not depend on accumulation of wealth, accolades, and praise but being faithful to God ... loving God ... loving people. This was the great discovery of the joyful saint ... St. Francis of Assisi. He was short on material things but he was rich in joy. He learned to allow Jesus to fill in what was lacking in his life.

But I think mostly ... this time of year the Christian finds joy in the trust ... in the hope ... in Christ's promise. But ... how can joy come from hope. Is not hope a virtue for people who do **not** possess what they want? Does not hope ... imply incompleteness, not yet having what we long for? Our work ... our relationships ... our leaders ... so often have failed to give us what we need. So ... our lives are marked by longing, incompleteness. But ... as the scriptures we heard today remind us: Christ is coming back! And that ... dear friends, is NOT a day for the **Christian** to fear – It is a day to rejoice! And **that** joy flows from the fact that He is on the way. In spite of all our temporal difficulties ... He will bring relief. The Apostle Paul invites us to **rejoice** out of this anticipation of the Lord's **second** coming. The joy is founded on hope built on a faith in the God who promised to come again ... a God who promised to make all things new ... a God who is thoroughly reliable. Christian joy is not based on things that pass away. It is built on being secure in God. Christian joy is based on the trust that God is here and **God is in charge!** It is based on the hope that as we do our part ... do what God asks of us ... the best way we can, all will be well.

Doing what God asks of us is also a great source of joy for the Christian ... giving ... helping those in need and today ... the so important command of the Gospel: “make straight the way of the Lord ...” We are to prepare ourselves ... repent of our sins so that we may be ready to receive the Lord in Eucharist when we celebrate Christmas in two short weeks ... and more important ... so that we can receive Him with true joy at the end of time. Until then ... **Gaudete!**