

Homily for the Third Sunday of Advent
December 17, 2017
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“REJOICE!”

The reading from St. Paul to the Thessalonians begins today! – one of the reasons we wear rose vestments today and light the rose candle, and this seems an odd word in a season of repentance. But Advent is not Lent and the kind of turning back we do in Advent is much different than the sojourn we take with our single lives in Lent. We turn back to prepare ourselves in order that we can welcome the Messiah and welcome the “day of the Lord” that he brings with him. In that world we can, as Paul says, rejoice, not just today but always, pray unceasingly and give thanks for everything. That is the life of a Christian after the coming of Christ. The advice of Paul to day today to us is wonderful advice: let us not quench the Spirit inside us.

In place of the Psalm today the liturgy gives us the beautiful prayer of Mary who was facing a whole lot of trouble, a birth when she was unmarried, fear of what would happen. But she doesn’t get down. In fact, she trusts God’s plan for her, and her Magnificat is reminiscent of the person that Isaiah has described, and that Jesus becomes. “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” I wish the translators could use a different word than fear, which in English has all sorts of negative connotations that it doesn’t really mean. Better would be: his mercy is for those in awe of him from generation to generation. We might fear that we are not good enough, but we are in awe of the Creator of all things.

The Gospel today is John’s version of the story that we read from Mark’s earlier Gospel last week, and staying true to John’s very metaphoric and symbolic Gospel, he presents Jesus as ‘light’. Later on, he even has Jesus say that he is the light of the world. John the Baptist’s job is to give testimony that Jesus is the light, the Messiah. The gospel writer presents John the Baptist using the words we read last week in Isaiah, and John describes himself as the one crying in the wilderness begging people to make straight the path for God. He again states that his baptism is just a symbol of the washing away of sin, but there is someone coming who will

wash away sin, and who is so great that John is almost a nothing in comparison. The two versions, though written many years apart, are very complimentary.

So how can we apply this to our own lives this week. I would ask you this week to concentrate on being in awe of God. Think of creation, nature, beauty, art, and face the realization that God is over all these things. He really is, to use the phrase of many today, “awesome”! In appreciating the things of God, the wonders of God, the enormity of God and his universe, we might seem very tiny and insignificant. But, then realize that God cares for each and every one of us – he goes after the one lamb who has strayed. We just need to repent, turn around and he will be there. So, rejoice always, as Paul says, and keep in mind the really wonderful season we are almost through, as we await and awaken to that light that we remember each Christmas day, and that we await to lighten our lives again when Jesus comes in glory.

And that is the Advent Good News suggested to us today!

Above all on this rejoice Sunday, we should rejoice that God loves us; that we have been redeemed by j. Christ. Again, this day, we celebrate the great Sacrament of Joy: the Eucharist which recalls Christ’s saving death and resurrection.