Rejoice!
Third Sunday Of Advent 2017

Refection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

This third Sunday in Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, which means “rejoice” in Latin. In English rejoice means to feel or to show great joy. Traditionally the pink candle in the Advent wreath, which was lighted at the beginning of Mass today, designates this day of joy. At this point in Advent, it is good to take the time in the midst of our Christmas preparations to seek some peace and experience the joy that is the fruit of peace. Unfortunately, it may be more likely for me, and I'm sure for many of you, to find ourselves fretting about what we still haven't done to prepare for Christmas. Let us take a few moments today to experience this joy and express it in our celebration this morning.

There is an important situation to acknowledge, as a compassionate community, regarding this season. There are those here this morning whose celebration of Christmas is not a happy occasion, because today may be a time of sickness, or failure, or emotional distress, or even the death of a loved one. As a
community, we need to hold these members with tender love by being present with them in their sadness. Our love expressed this way can be a sign of God’s unconditional love. This may help to show that there is a difference between joy and happiness and that one can feel joy even in the midst of sadness. Happiness is based on external conditions. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved.

There are three things we rejoice in, on this day: The coming of Christ, the Coming of Christ, and... the coming of Christ. We celebrate the coming of Christ 2000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea. We celebrate the coming of Christ in our hearts in the present. And we celebrate the coming of Christ at the end of time. Each of these events is crucial in our life of faith and important for our joy.

2000 years ago Joseph had to walk 90 miles with his expectant wife Mary from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem in the south, east of Jerusalem for the census. This trip would take a traveler, five or six days under the best of conditions, however, it was probably longer for the Holy Family considering that Mary was late in her pregnancy. For me, this would not be a happy occasion. It was, however, an occasion that brought joy, even in the midst of their hardship. Parents here, especially mothers, certainly know that birthing a child is difficult, and can even be fraught with danger, but there also can be a joy.

The coming of Jesus in the present is also an occasion of joy, though it may be difficult to express this joy if we have been distracted by the preparations for the holiday. Please do not let your sadness or worry dampen the joy of the coming of Jesus into your hearts. Like Mary and Joseph let us experience the fullness of God’s grace so as to birth Jesus in our families and community this holy season. If we are fortunate, and we are secure in this joy, let us express it freely and share that joy with others who find this season difficult in their present circumstances. Perhaps we can make room in our homes, or in our hearts by including others. Those who are sick, or have lost their employment, or are mourning the loss of a loved one.

Like Isaiah in our first reading we too are being "sent to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, to announce a year of favor from the Lord, and to comfort all who mourn." (cf Isaiah 61: 1-2) It is our sure and certain hope that, at the second coming of Jesus, all sadness, fear, and sickness will be wiped away with any tears we may have shed in this life. Then our joy will be complete.