

Homily
December 17, 2023
Gaudete Sunday / 3rd Sunday of Advent
22:16 – 33:27

♪ Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say rejoice!

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You know this. Some of the children may have sung it. It is really meant for children, more than not. And it's a "round." The second part starts a little later than the first and it just goes on and on until somebody says, "Stop!"

Why would I sing it? It's been a worm in my head all week. Monday morning, reading the readings I thought, "Oh, boy. Here it goes. And it's just gone on and on."

Every prayer we hear today, from the Collect, the Prayer Over the Gifts, the Preface, the Prayer After Communion, all contain the word, "Rejoice." In fact, all of our readings contain the word, "Rejoice."

And that's why we call this "Gaudete Sunday." Yes. Gaudete Sunday. Guess what that means in Latin. (to a child) Yes. Rejoice! Very good.

But for what are we rejoicing? It's got to be more than we are halfway through Advent. You know, kind of...yay! No. It's more than that. It's much more. We are rejoicing because we are soon to approach the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord. That is, the one who came among us as one like us, to be Yeshua, that is, "Savior."

This One, this Christ, because he is Christ, is the "Anointed One." Now, it's very important that we rejoice about that, about him. But I believe our readings indicate today that there's reason for us to rejoice, that would lead us to that sort of rejoicing.

The prophet Isaiah, in this Chapter 61, declares that he is rejoicing because he is anointed. Anointed. That means that oil, usually, is poured on one who is anointed. King David is a good example. Aaron the priest is a good example.

Anointed. It meant that you were set aside by God for a specific purpose. Obviously, David, as king and shepherd. Aaron as priest. Anointed. “Dedicated,” if you will. Given purpose in the Covenant of Moses. This is the first and only prophet that’s ever noted as being anointed.

That’s the first thing.

The second is that the anointing led him to know that he was to proclaim the Good News to the poor. To proclaim justice. To proclaim the needs of the people being met. That was the fulfillment of the anointing. And we know from reading all 66 chapters of Isaiah, he did a good job.

The second part of that First Reading, though...it sounds like it’s about “I.” But actually, it’s a corporate “I.” It is the people of Jerusalem, who have returned from the exile. And the prophet tells them, “Good news! You have a mission.” You’re home. You’re well. There are challenges, yes, but your role now is to become, in your rejoicing, a beacon to the nations. All the nations. Not just a few.

So, they now have purpose and meaning, post exile. Be ready. The nations will come to you.

Well, that’s about them. What are we to do with it?

How many here have been anointed? Raise your hands. When were you anointed? Baptism! Very early, for most of us. We are anointed with Chrism on our foreheads to strengthen us, to live out the gift that we’ve been given: the forgiveness of original sin and to live the Gospel.

Then there’s another anointing that takes place. Confirmation! Again, on the forehead, but this time, “Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” Now, we are sent to proclaim the Good News. To live it. To wrap our lives in it.

But that’s not the last anointing. For priests, it’s the hands. We are dedicated by that anointing on our hands to go and be priests among the people, to serve in the person of Christ, who is the head. But there’s more. (You knew there was more, right?)

See this altar here? Do you remember when it was dedicated? The bishop – archbishop – poured oil in five places and then smeared it all over the altar. It was dedicated. It was anointed to serve a specific purpose for the people of God. It is THE symbol of Christ in

this room. It is the one around which we gather. Since Christ was the Anointed One, it is dedicated, set aside for one purpose: celebrating the Eucharist. And perhaps at times to expose the Eucharist on it during a period of Adoration.

I left one out though. There is another one. The bishop. When the bishop is anointed, which is a part of the ritual. - you've got the perfect head for this. - They pour the oil on his head and then they rub it in, to proclaim that he, like Aaron and Moses and David, are set aside for a specific part of the Covenant in Christ. (It's a lot easier if their head looks like that, as opposed to this. [rubbing his hair]). But I'm not worried. It's too late and I wouldn't want the job if they offered it.

Is that not enough reason to rejoice? That we, the People of God, are dedicated – first as an individual and then as a people, bound together by this anointing? Isn't it wonderful that we can, as a corporate body reveal God in the world? And isn't it wonderful that we gather in a building that is named after us? Church. Itself, not only the altar, but the walls of the church when it's new or renovated, are anointed.

That's enough reason to rejoice, don't you think?

But I'm going to offer you something from the Second Reading. That's where we got that "Rejoice always. Again, I say rejoice." The second thing it says is, "Pray always." And then, "Give thanks in all circumstances." Really? Even when things are rough and if we can thank God, we get through it easier. We get through it easier.

So, if you want to move toward that rejoicing, pray. Connect with God in prayer – formal, or informal, meditative or reading. And if you want to truly connect to that rejoicing, be thankful in all circumstances.

Now, you have a whole week to practice. What a good thing to practice: prayer, thanksgiving – leading to rejoicing. Rejoicing in the gift of salvation in Christ.