

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT CYCLE A DECEMBER 15, 2019.

REV. THOMAS W. WYRSCH

DARE TO REJOICE

We are hopeful today. We've had the receiving of David Salvatierra, a father of four children of our parish is a candidate for the sacraments of the church at Easter. He's been baptized before. Other people, unbaptized, are being received as catechumens throughout the church somewhere these days, and others like David being received as a candidate for the sacraments.

Partly in response of that but, in our Mass in general today, I've been delegated to tell you that the church expects something of you today. "Oh boy", some of you would say. After all I'm here, Father and I'll be giving my contribution--I guess you will, or have already—and I try to live a good life and do what I can, do as much volunteering serving the parish as I can. "What more can the church expect?"

Well it's good to know what people expect of us. At work you'd better have a good idea of what's expected of you. You might do wonderful work, but if it's not what they expect or need from you, they're not going to value it as highly. And in what I call our core relationships our marriage, parenting, having parents, neighbors and community, we go along and pretty much know that we're trying to meet the expectations of the other, but it's good to ask once in a while: "Am I measuring up to what you want? Is this what you were looking for? Am I helping you out?"

So today's a day to ask the church, What *do* you expect? The Catholic Church, of me. And today, the Third Sunday of Advent, I'm to tell you that the Catholic Church expects you to rejoice. Gaudete. You know the word, from old Latin 2000 years ago. Gaudete simply meaning we rejoice. We've done our best to trim things out in pink today. Deacon Bill and I have the stoles that have as much of the rose color as we can. These big beautiful banners behind me here at the altar, we put them up a couple years ago, just a rose color, we didn't did know how well they look against our carpet, with that nice rose-colored stripe that winds around our carpet. One of our parishioners, Kenny Winschel, had done that years ago.

So it's the rose-colored day, and it's a day the church tells us to rejoice. I can imagine several reactions. Some would just say "Sure, that's fine. I rejoice all the time anyway. That's who I am." Others may say "Don't tell me how to feel!" It's not a feeling, telling you to rejoice. We're not telling you how to feel. And others may say, "Father, I don't feel like rejoicing. I don't have things set in my life that would move me to rejoice." So we have to look at this and say why would the church tell us to rejoice? when we may not feel like it, at least not always depending on where our lives are at.

Well, of course Christmas being near now--next week, the middle of the week sort of frames our joy. But beyond that the church uses this time, the nearness of Christmas to say that we are a rejoicing people. That is who we are. That is who we are to be, people who rejoice, at the nearness of our God at all times.

Just like a couple of weeks ago we used Christmas coming to remember, Oh yes, the Lord is coming in glory at the end of time. So the nearness of Christmas led us to remember the ultimate coming. Now joy at Christmas can make us remember the ongoing joy that a Christian is to live with. We'll have to see how that works out.

To rejoice in the way the Church is calling us to today, we have to be editors. In fact we all are. The editors of the news, they don't tell us everything that's going on. They couldn't possibly anyway. You're not going to see on the news tonight that there was a wonderful ceremony at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne Church in Florissant at 10:30 where a young man was welcomed as a candidate to be received into the church, and joining the faith of his children that he's brought them toward, and his wife; and you're not going to hear on the news tonight not how the rest of the Mass went, and how our rose colored banners blend so well with our carpet, and that the people were instructed to rejoice. We'll hear about shootings, as always, and the political mess the country is in, all the impeachment stuff is to be going on for weeks and weeks. And other things that do drive things between people and that make for unhappy lives,

But we are editors, and like the editors might at the end of every newscast maybe make one feel good story, we can look at our lives and see if we don't have more than one story to rejoice. Because if we look at all the things that are happening, and don't filter out the good which for some reasons we sometimes do, we will have cause to rejoice today. Not only the church telling you to rejoice, but we will have our own cause to rejoice

Now you are all hopeful people! I don't know if you see yourself like that, but I do, because you're here! You're here at Mass, you came looking for something. It's a lot of hassle to get up at the right time, maybe you ate earlier, maybe you will later; get dressed, and get in the car to come up here. It's not an automatic thing to do, you do it as a choice because you want something that you believe you can get at least a piece of here; and I think you're right. By being together, praying in the Lord, we *can* get something that we want and hope for very much. We hope for it because we know that it's here.

We hope for other things at times that there's not a lot of cause to hope. Our model today is John the Baptist. We heard at the beginning of the gospel, John was in prison and he knew where this will go. Just some days after this he would wind up with that famous scene of his head on a platter. That's what John knew, maybe knew it not exactly like that, but he knew he wasn't going to get out of prison alive. So from prison he sent his disciples to say: "Is this the Christ? I hear things are happening. Are you the one?" John was hopeful even in prison. So the disciples went and Jesus said, quoting Isaiah today. "Just tell John this: the blind are seeing, cripples are walking, lepers are cured, dead are raised to life; and in a real side of the presence of God, the poor had the good news preached to them." Yes, John, your hope in your prison cell is validated. It's worthwhile to hope, because you knew that I was coming,

The crowds came out, to seek hope, just like you came out to Mass today. There was Jesus out in the desert, and the crowds left the places where they were and went to the desert. Jesus said "What did you come up to the desert to see?" You didn't come out to see someone in fine robes, you knew there wouldn't be someone in fine robes here. You've had enough of that in the

Roman officials-- who cares about fine, fancy robes? You came out here to get something. And Jesus would say, I am here to give it to you, building on the preaching John the Baptist. So the hope of the crowds drove them out to see him.

We select then from our own lives, those things which we could say not that make us feel happy necessarily, but that we recognize that God is acting in our life, and will act, and we trust that. So we kind of practice on this Sunday. I look at you all and I know many of your stories-- certainly not all of them, but many of them. There are bereaved people here who just lost somebody within weeks or months. It's a tough place to be. Whole families are here working together, doing their best, that's never easy. And yet if we look at the home we have, physically and in our family; if we look at the people God has supplied us, look at the community here, we can rejoice! And say yes God is good to me.

Does it depend on luck? "Father, it depends on what's going on in my life." Well, to a point. Bad things that happen might make it difficult to look for hope, but you know what-- I think about baseball at a time like this--about luck. Which teams are luckier? And the great minds of baseball say similar thing. Mike Shannon will say "You make your own luck." The great baseball mind Branch Rickey said, "Luck is the residue of design." In other words, the teams that really prepare, the teams at work at it, the teams that are focused and execute things during the game, they're going to look luckier than the next team. They're actually not. They have a vision, and they work harder towards it.

We can be lucky too. We can't have everything go our own way. We can't escape suffering. But even in the midst of it, we can look and see the people that God gives us to support us. This is why Jesus could be so loving and express his trust in God even from the Cross. So we want to do that preparation work like a baseball team to be lucky, to be able to recognize what God gives us to deal with things in our lives.

This is the Christian—the person who cultivates, and knows how to form hope where other people might not see hope. Or is it the Christian today? You might remember that on this Sunday, year after year, I like to quote my favorite Advent author, Fr. Benedict Nocent, a Benedictine. He talks about Christians being called to be joyful, but he says "what we see around us are sad-faced Christian who claim with a little pride that they live in anxiety." Ouch. Are we Christians who see Christ in our lives? And who at least sometimes, sometimes force ourselves to recognize the good blessings and support that God is giving us? Or do we kind of like to kind of brag, with little pride, about how bad off we are? It can be dangerous sometimes to go to any one of us and talk about a physical ailment, because you'll hear theirs: "Oh Honey, you don't know. Here's what I got!" We sort of compete in our misery, I'm not sure why that is. We sort of compete in our misery. I'm not sure why that is, but the Christian doesn't stay there. We might go through times of feeling sorry for ourselves, but if we look closer we see God, not letting us be there, because God is so good to us. So Fr. Nocent said, instead of just bragging that you live in anxiety, the Christian "deliberately maintains optimism, and cultivates it." We work at it, selecting those things that are going to make it possible for us to live with hope this third Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah lived in a very difficult time. The people had been through the Babylonian exile and the king was decreeing that the people could go back to their home in Israel. But what would they go back to? Only a small remnant had been left there to run things in the name of the Babylonian government. So what were they going home to? And along the long arduous journey home, not all of them would make it. Isaiah went to the crowd returning from the exile, and said, “ Here's what you're going to find: the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared, the lame leap, and all will enter Zion, singing joy. He couldn't see that, not with his eyes, but he saw it with his faith. So he said, “ If your hands are feeble, they'll be strengthened. If your knees are weak, consider them firm. And say to all those hearts are frightened , “Be strong, fear not, here is your God.” Isaiah took it sheerly on faith. Not everything was in place when they went back, but over time they reestablished their community. They found those wonders that Isaiah was talking about.

So we are deputized, called today to rejoice-- to reasonably, responsibly be rejoicing people, in line with centuries of people of faith who have done so. To look at our lives for what God has done is. And we can't help but to admit what God has given us, we rejoice.