

Gaudete Sunday

Rejoice in the Lord always,
I shall say it again: Rejoice!

Phil. 4:4

Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,

On this **Third Sunday of Advent 2020**, St. Paul in the Second Reading says: *Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.* But how can we pray unceasingly? A fifth century African shows the way. He wrote a book telling the story of his life. It's not like a modern autobiography because he writes the book as a prayer to God. The book shows how everything can become part of a conversation with God. He brings in his anxieties, successes, conflicts, discoveries, frustrations, even his sinful behavior. It all becomes part of a dialogue with God. The book is called *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. I encourage you to read it or re-read it or listen to an audio version. *The Confessions* opens with this line, "O God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee."

Augustine shows how every moment can become a conversation with God. Now some will object that constant prayer will divide one's attention. Not so. All us have inner chatter. "I hope I don't blow it. What is he thinking about me? I wish I hadn't eaten that hamburger." That inner chatter is what distracts us. But when a person focuses on God, he becomes more focused on the person in front of him: This person has an eternal destiny. I need to take him seriously.

I know this kind of prayer is not easy and also the willingness to forgive myself and my neighbor is a challenging thing in daily life. Always has been, always will be - but particularly in our society. Cardinal Francis George said we live in culture that tolerates everything and forgives nothing. People say, "I am very forgiving person but what he did was unforgivable." That attitude makes people think some sins are OK, others beyond the pale. They imagine that if they told the priest everything he would throw them out of the confessional. I've been a priest for 9 years, and I've never turned away any penitent. I may not be able to give full absolution, but always at least a blessing and a prayer.

Forgiveness is beautiful. One of the greatest joys is to extend and receive forgiveness.

At weddings, couples often request Chapter 13 of Corinthians. One line says that love bears all, hopes all, endures all. Paul is not saying we should never draw a line. He does so himself, telling the Corinthians to excommunicate a man behaving shamefully. He quarantines the man only in the hope he will change his life and come back. In the end he insists that love does forgive all.

Revenge brings temporary satisfaction but long-term misery. Forgiveness may cause temporary pain but it brings long term joy. So rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

For today, on this Gaudete (Rejoice!) Sunday remember that that we are called to pray without ceasing. Rejoice always.

Have a Blessed 3rd Week of Advent!

Fr. Rafal Ligenza

St. Joseph Parish Administrator