

REJOICE! Gaudete Sunday Calls us to Live as Joyful Christians in All Circumstances

By Deacon Keith A. Fournier
Catholic Online

In just a few short days we will celebrate His Birth. However, on this day we pause to remember that He has already come, He is coming and He will come again.

I know, it seems that no matter where you look there is bad news! However, all of the pain, hurt, fear, worry, and that awful killer on the loose in our modern mania, fear and stress, need not distract us from the source of true Joy, Jesus Christ! In times like this I thank God for the great gift of the liturgical year of the Church. The Feasts we celebrate, and our preparation for them, are an invitation to participate, even now, in the life to come. So it is with Gaudete Sunday, the



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Sunday of rejoicing. Christian joy is not rooted in the circumstances and struggles of our daily lives. Often, they are the bad fruit of the disorder and brokenness caused by sin. Christian Joy finds its root in the relationship we now have, in and through Jesus Christ, with the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We rejoice on Gaudete Sunday, because the Lord is always near, He is always coming to those who have the eyes of living faith.

CHESAPEAKE, VA (Catholic Online)
- This is the Third Sunday in our Advent Season, Gaudete Sunday, a special Sunday dedicated to Rejoicing in the Liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church. The older I get, the more I realize the real meaning of this beautiful Sunday. Difficulties, stress, and even tragedy - experiences which at first glance

seem to cause us to respond with anything but joy, can be transformed in the life of a believer and actually become its very source. Our first reading at Holy Mass in this cycle comes from Zephaniah:

"Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has removed the judgment against you he has turned away your enemies; the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, he will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals."

In our Gospel, we again encounter John the Baptizer, one of our key Advent figures. The Gospel appointed is from Luke (Luke 3:10-18). John is instructing the crowds on how they should repent and reform their lives - and how to actually live differently in light of the One to whom he points, the Messiah, Jesus. He recognizes that the fulfillment of all the messianic promises of the Hebrew prophets has come - in the person of Jesus Christ, and he points the way to Him.

John is a man of living faith whose eyes have been opened by the grace and goodness of God. He is held out to us a model for very good reasons. No matter what his circumstances, he is always watching for the Lord. Are we? Jesus said of John: "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11)

That includes you and me!

We have been given entry into the kingdom of God. It began in Baptism and is lived out in the life we now live in the Church, which is a seed of the kingdom to come. The Lord continues to come to each one of us as we live our life in His Body and receive the continual grace, which comes to us through the Sacraments, his Word and our life together. We truly ARE the Body of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). He is the Head of His Body, and He continues His mission now, in and through you and me.

What a wonderful calling we all we have to a live new way of life, beginning now and opening up into eternity. Our real work now, as Christians, is to lead the world to the source of true and lasting joy, Jesus Christ! No matter what our state

in life, vocation, job or station in life, we are all the missionaries of the Lord Jesus Christ and this is a new missionary age.

The focus on joy this Sunday reminds us not only that all of the Old Testament promises were all fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ, but that Jesus is always coming to those who look for Him and welcome Him into their daily lives. When He comes into the life of a believer, he or she receives a source of joy that can never be taken away; a fountain to which we can always return. They are also given the grace, the divine life they need to begin to see, with the eyes of living faith, that the Lord is always coming, He is always near to those who live their lives in Him. When we have Him, we have all we need.

Jesus is the cause and source of our rejoicing. St. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:4-7)

He gave the Thessalonians the same direction in his letter to them, "*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus*". (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24) We need to hear these words today. These are not simply bible verses in a book, contained in a letter written almost two thousand years ago. They are invitations to you and me!

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is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed. Many are the troubles of the just, but the LORD delivers from them all." (Psalm 34:19, 20)

In a matter of days we will celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, Christmas. The Church, as mother and teacher, calls us on this third Sunday of Advent to pause from our Advent preparation for that celebration and be filled with joy! She summons us in the liturgy today by using the imperative case to - "**Rejoice!**" It is a conscious decision, a choice, infused with grace, which then opens us up for receiving joy as a gift from the Lord. The color of our celebration changes to reflect this invitation to rejoice. Bishops, priests and deacons have, up to this point, worn purple or lavender vestments symbolizing the penitential nature of our Advent preparation. On this Sunday, they are replaced with vestments of a rose color, a color of joy.

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As Christians, we know that the Lord has already come, in the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Word has become flesh and He has dwelt among us (John 1). Life is forever changed and the whole world is being recreated in Him. We are also being made new in Him. The Apostle Paul reminds us that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is now a new creation. (2 Cor. 5:17) Nothing in our past can drag us down because; we can always get back up. We are made new in Jesus - who comes to save us and set us free.

This is where we find our Joy, in an encounter with Him. We are invited to live our lives now in His Body, the Church. We are the new Zion, freed from our bondage and called to rejoice! Another Gospel passage in St Matthew (Mt. 11:2-11) similarly points to our Advent teacher, John the Baptizer, and instructs us on how to make this a reality. John knows that the source of his joy is Jesus Christ. He calls everyone who will listen to him to prepare the way for the Lord, in their hearts, their lives, their homes and their world. In both his preaching and his life witness, the John the Baptizer calls for a total reformation.

That point is an important one. Because the Lord is near we must actually live differently. The way of joy passes along the path of self-emptying, the way of humility. The Baptizer reminds us that we must decrease so that we can be filled

up with Jesus, the source of all joy. The way to joy is through self-emptying, sacrificial love. This lifestyle change should characterize Christians. It is why, before they were called Christians at Antioch, they were referred to as "the Way" (Acts 22:4). Christianity is not just something we do on Sunday; it is a new way of living. By living our lives right now, "in the Lord", we can find the Joy proclaimed on this Gaudete Sunday and become vehicles of this joy for others.

John told the crowds, *"I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* We have received that Baptism and with it comes all the grace we need to respond to the invitation. We simply need to pray and ask for it regularly. Prayer is a conversation with God. He listens while we speak to Him and we listen as He responds. Prayer is rooted in a relationship and informs a lifestyle. John's humility points us to the road on which we are invited to walk. He became a man of Joy because he was a man of humility! His life wasn't all about him! So too, our lives are not all about us! John emptied himself - of himself - and thereby became one who could reveal Jesus to others. His humility opened a space within him for true joy, the kind which comes from the real presence of the Lord. So, it can be for each one of us.

Living in the first home of the whole human race, his mother's womb, this last Prophet of the Old Testament and First Prophet of the New responded to the arrival of Jesus with a dance and just kept living in joy. The Gospel account records the visit of Mary to Elizabeth: *"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, 'Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.' And Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.'" (Luke 1: 41-47)*

Joy fills Elizabeth, inspires Mary to sing a canticle of praise - and causes the child John to dance in the womb. Joy is a **Person** - named Jesus. When we encounter Him, we encounter Joy. In the fourth Gospel, the theologian John records the Baptizer explaining the source of his supernatural joy, *"The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete. He must increase; I must decrease."* (John 1:29 - 30)

As we walk through the remaining days of Advent, the two biblical persons held before us in our readings at Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours will be John the Baptizer and Mary. Mary's humility brought heaven to earth and earth to heaven. Mary was also a woman of deep joy because she became the habitation of happiness, the first living tabernacle of God. She overflows with Jesus and imparts joy to us all. We sometimes call her, among her many other wonderful titles, the "*cause of our Joy*". That is because she bore the One who is its source, Jesus Christ.

We can find this kind of joy, this genuine happiness, beginning today, no matter what our circumstances, if we turn to the Lord. The Apostle Paul lived an arduous life of discipleship. He suffered greatly, physically, in relationships and spiritually. Yet, he too was a man of this kind of joy and we hear it in his admonitions to the early Church found in his letters. Christian joy does not depend on circumstances, but on relationship. A relationship with the Lord who always comes to those who have eyes opened by living faith.

On this Gaudete Sunday let us embrace by grace the way of humility and find the happiness of heaven - beginning right here on earth. St. Josemaria Escriva, a Saint of our own time who teaches us that the universal call to holiness embraces every vocation and state in life, once wrote, "*I am every day more convinced that happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth.*" (The Forge, 1005)

On this Gaudete Sunday, Rejoice!

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