

My dear people of God, the third Sunday of Advent is called **Gaudete Sunday!** Which simple means **Rejoice Sunday!** Thus we turn to Paul's proclamation: "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice.... The Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:4-5). These words taken from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians give this Sunday the liturgical name "Gaudete Sunday". Today, the liturgy urges us to rejoice because the birth of the Lord is approaching: in fact, we are left with only 8 days for us to celebrate Christmas. According to St. Paul, we will find our happiness, firstly, "in the Lord." We will find our happiness by living the Christian life. St. Paul does not tell us to wait until we have all our ducks in a row. He says, "Rejoice always." Fortunately, St. Paul explains how to do it. The first thing he says is to pray. When things go wrong, especially when they fall apart. So pray without ceasing. The second step to joy is gratitude. Paul says, "In all circumstances give thanks"(1Thes.5:16-118).

Advent is the liturgical season that prepares us for the Lord's birth, but it is also the time of expectation for the *definitive return of Christ for the last judgment*, and St. Paul refers, in the first place, to this second coming. The very fact that the conclusion of the liturgical year coincides with the beginning of Advent suggests that "the beginning of the time of salvation is in some way linked to the "end of time". This exhortation typical of Advent always applies: "**The Lord is at hand!**"

Dear friends, John 1: 19-34, forms a unity, beginning and ending with reference to John the Baptist's '**testimony**': it thereby emphasizes the mission given him by God to bear witness, by his life and preaching, to Jesus as **the Messiah and the Son of God**. He exhorts people **to repent and do penance**. Again John the Baptist points Jesus out as the **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**. He made this proclamation boldly in the presence of Jewish authorities. For the first time in the Gospel, Christ is called the 'Lamb of God'. John is comparing the sufferings of the Servant of Yahweh, the Messiah with the sacrifice of the lamb (Is.53:7).

In the Gospel, John the Baptist was asked, "Who are you?" and he declared, "I am not the Messiah" (John 1:20) and he went on to say, I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie (John 1:26-27). In John the Baptist, we see a model for our own spirituality, knowing **our smallness and nothingness**, that we are not worthy to untie even the sandal strap of the Lord. John the Baptist pointed away from himself to Jesus. **Humility**, like that of John the Baptist in the Gospel today, brings happiness.

John the Baptist gives us a clue to **the secret of human greatness**. The lives of the saints give us insights into the way to **respect and esteem**. All of the really great people we've known, if we think about them, are people who have been astonishingly careless about their own importance. In fact, they really don't even know that they are important. If human accolades come to them, they are quite appreciative of them, but then they go on about their task whether or not they receive any accolades at all from the crowd. Furthermore, I have found that really great people are often surprised when people pay them tribute.

John the Baptist was a great man. Jesus Christ said of him: "**Of all of the men born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist.**" What did John the Baptist say about Jesus? "I must decrease, He must increase" (John 3:30). In other words, John the Baptist's awareness was centered on the presence of God in our midst. Ordinary eyes couldn't perceive the Presence of God in the midst of our humanity, but John the Baptist's eyes could. John was free to see reality, the way and the truth and the spirit of human life, and the spark of Divinity hidden within both Christ's humanity and within ours.

Finally, dear friends, these beautiful texts we heard proclaimed from the Word of God today remind us that true joy and happiness is to be found only in God. God is the answer. Only in God can we find true joy and happiness. Those who abandon God are on the road to sorrow and pain. Let us pray in this Mass for the grace to understand our Christian calling like John the Baptist and work with humility. So that when our life on earth is over He will welcome us to the joy of eternal life. Amen!