

December 16, 2018 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

This coming Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. I will be in the confessional, so anyone who has missed penance services or just can't drive at night, can come to confession.

This guy is driving down a country road and hears a thud, (I hate that) he gets out of the car and there's not another car or anything in sight, so he drives on home. The next day the sheriff comes and arrests him for a hit and run accident. He ran over a pig and didn't stop and that was against the law. (Actually, in Phoenix, it's against the law to run over a cat or dog and not find the owner.) He protested, it wasn't him and he asked the sheriff how could he possibly know he was guilty. The sheriff said, "The pig squealed."

In the days when we had Mass in Latin, today was called "Gaudete Sunday." Gaudete means be joyful or rejoice, either one. Our liturgy today shows that. We've lit the rose candle, I'm wearing rose vestments, and we're talking about joy, in the middle of the season of Advent which used to be about repentance and penance, so we're talking about joy. Now the thing is, the music also should have changed for Advent, we should only have a piano, not guitars, not everything else. Then today we would have everything to show that we're rejoicing. But, it's easier to keep them running just the way they are. "We can enjoy their great music and things because we really do love you. (Applause) For those of you who haven't been with us along time when we met in the school, this will just have to go as an aside. This Mass was totally without music for a long time and then Donna and Karen came up to me and said, "Father, wouldn't you like to have music at this Mass?" My normal reaction is, no. But, my other reaction that transcends that eventually is yes, because I like everybody being involved and everybody at the 8 o'clock needs a little bit of a pick-me-up; a lot of you haven't had enough coffee yet so we've got to get you awake. But now that we have them I can't imagine the 8 o'clock without them, so I'm glad they're here. That's part of the thing that the Church recommends, it also says don't have flowers until today so that this day is set apart because of rejoicing and being joyful. You know we like to have a good sense of humor and enjoy a few laughs but it's better to have a sense of joy in our hearts. Laughter can fade away but joy, true joy stays with us.

In our first reading Zephaniah the prophet; he told people during an especially difficult time, "Sing for joy." They had been taken captive, they had been put into exile in another country, and now Zephaniah's saying, "Rejoice! Rejoice because God is coming, God is going to be in our midst pretty soon." Saint Paul, when he wrote the letter the Philippians, our second reading, Saint Paul was sitting in prison. A prison in those days was horrible. The prisons over in Florence today are like five-star hotels, compared to what they had with Paul and Peter. Saint Paul is telling us, "Rejoice!" He is saying God is in our midst. If we listen to the media we get the impression that joy springs from having lots of things, but the scriptures tell us joy comes from knowing the Lord is here, the Lord is in our midst. We have an advantage over the people of Zephaniah's time, 700 years before Christ, because we now believe that we will be with God for all eternity. They didn't have an idea of heaven or hell, they had sheol. Sheol was a waiting room for the dead, kind of like a doctors' office where the doctor never comes back. A waiting room, nobody went anywhere, they just sat there, they didn't have heaven or hell. Now, you and I know that there is something past this life and that God has come into our midst and continually comes into our midst. So if we don't have joy within us because God is in our midst and we received the Savior and Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, then maybe some of these things are stealing the joy from us. Feeling sorry for ourselves, constantly putting other people down to make us look better or smarter.

Putting ourselves down when we make a mistake and we beat ourselves up with a hammer forever instead of putting it back in the toolbox. One of the ways to get over that is confession. We still have five more penance services coming up in five more parishes this week. Coolidge is Monday; Florence is Friday. All at seven o'clock.

The other thing is holding onto anger and resentment, it eats us up inside and produces no joy. We have to forgive, that way we get rid of that ball and chain that's holding us down. Thinking and believing what the culture says; having more things is going to make us happy. More and more people I talk to are saying, "Father, I'm getting rid of things." Some people say they're practicing the 90% rule. 90% rule, I had to ask, is getting rid of 90% of your possessions so you're not weighted down, not stressed out or worried because somebody's going to take them or they're going to break or whatever. Or, what are you going to do with them you die, because everybody wants to take it with them. And then of course, the two biggest things that take our joy away from us and we can never help them: fear and worry. We're afraid of the unknown; we worry about things outside of our control. Paul tells us, "Don't have anxiety, don't." But there are ways that we create anxiety for ourselves that we don't need. There are also many things that cause us anxiety that we can do nothing about. You know what we have to do? "Okay God, I realize I can't control them so I'm putting them in your hands." And truly mean it. "God they're in your hands." If all of these things go against joy, then what will lead to joy? We have to choose it. We have to choose to be joyful. Just like those who have been in long term relationships and married for a while, know you have to choose to be in love. These young couples come and they want to get married, you know the stars and birds are flying around their heads, and you know, they are floating on clouds or they're going through a flowered field and all of this and their just, "Oh, it's wonderful," and everything. And then the first time after they're married and one of them throws up; how much in love are you really? So we have to make choices, we can choose to be miserable, we can choose to be down. When we had dinner before last penance service, us priests were talking about this very thing and almost all of us are saying; we are practicing joy, we are getting away from negativity, we're trying to even get away from some of the priests that are always negative. We know of two of them off the bat that the news runs 24 hours a day in the rectory and they're always negative and they're always down about these things. Guess how many priests go and see them? Not very many because it's too hard. We have to choose. Abraham Lincoln said, "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." If you're going to be happy, you make yourself happy. If your going to be joyful, you make yourself joyful. Dr. Hans Selye was the scientist who developed and researched the concept of stress, he would agree. He said it's generally not the things outside of us that create stress for us, but it's the way we respond to these things. We can always say, "Oh, I'm going to absorb all of this and I'm going to be miserable and I'll freak out, my blood pressures going to go up, I'll have a heart attack and stroke." Or, we can say, "Well, it's like water off a ducks back. I'll pray about it and move on." The other thing is we need to be good and do good. People are always telling me that, "Father, be good, be nice." I wonder what they're trying to say. If we don't feel good about ourselves we won't be good. People in today's gospel, they asked John the Baptist questions, they come along and they say, "What should we do?" The reason is, the people of Israel were used to being always told what to do by prophets, by the religious leaders and up to this point the religious leaders were failing them and they hadn't had a prophet in hundreds of years. So now John comes and they have to figure out, "What is God's will for me?" Today we look at it and say, "Am I doing something immoral or illegal?" Then I'm doing God's will, if it's no. The lay people, the civilians came in and said, "What should we do?" He said, "If you have more than enough of anything, share it." The tax collectors, "What should we do?" He said, "Stop cheating the people, stop

taking more than what you're supposed to." Soldiers came in. He said, "Don't practice extortion, don't falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." Because what the soldiers would do is they would hold people hostage, they'd put the sword up to their throat and say, "Give me all your money or you're going to die." So John is telling them, "Stop it." So they ask him what to do and you know, all we have to do is read the gospels, the ten commandments, and we have to realize it's more than just saying, "I believe." We have to do actions. The book of James says, "Faith without works is dead." We have to have actions with our words.

The last thing that's really important is gratitude. Saying thank you. Being grateful, once again, is an intentional thing. Saying thank you for everything. When I was a child I used to hear, "Praise the Lord. Thank you God. Thank you Jesus." Haven't heard that much anymore. I go home to visit my Mom's family in the hills of Kentucky, they're all Baptists, they say, "Praise the Lord." They also say, "The good Lord willing and the creek don't rise." But that doesn't work in Arizona because our creeks rarely rise. But being thankful and grateful. Not just to God but to people around us, thanking people for doing little things for us, thanking people for this that or the other thing. This guy held the door open for one of my nieces and instead of saying thank you, she grouches and says, "I can do that myself." I wanted to slap her upside the head. But, I was her Godfather so, you know, I have to do it the right way.

Gratitude, gratitude makes our heart lighter. Gratitude makes our souls lighter. It makes us realize, "I'm not alone. I can't do this by myself" Gratitude is a tremendous, tremendous thing. So, today we're reminded, rejoice! We have a reason to rejoice, not just temporary, not just today but always, because our gift is the greatest we've ever had, God is here with us and we're going to receive Him in a little bit. None of the Jews in the old Testament would ever have thought that was possible.

God bless you.