

December 17, 2017 Third Sunday of Advent.

First, I want to apologize to my parents, who are visiting, and all those who came down from Washington State this weekend, for the rain. For all the rest of us, no, we've got to have it. I have some bad news for some of you. Next weekend, you have to go to Mass twice, in 48 hours. Some people just tell me, "Father, I only go to Mass once a week; I can't take any more than that!" That's horrible. One guy told me last night, "well Father, I've got it planned, I'm going to go twice on Sunday and get it over with." Okay, that's really good Catholicism. So yes, we have to go once for Sunday and once for Christmas. There is no Mass anywhere in the weekend that will take the place of both. Our American efficiency falls apart next weekend. So, you have to see me twice in that time.

Little Johnnie was coming home in the car with his family from his little brother's baptism, and he was sobbing, sobbing his poor little heart out. And his Dad, as he is driving down the road says, "Johnnie what is the matter?" He asked him three times. Johnnie said, "the priest said that I have to live in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys."

Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is the Latin word for rejoice. This Sunday has been on the calendar as that Sunday, from the sixth century. Hundreds and hundreds of years they've been celebrating this Sunday as "rejoice Sunday." We have been wearing different colored vestments since all that time. We've only had the candles since a thousand years. So, this goes further back than that wreath. We look at it and we say, "where did Gaudete, rejoice come from?" It comes from the entrance antiphon, in the Latin version of the Mass. We don't see it because we don't do Latin, in our regular Mass. But rejoice. We get it because we are half way through Advent. You have to remember, that Advent used to be the same as Lent. You would empty out all your cupboards, of animal products; no butter, no fats of any kind, no meat of any kind. Only, you could get fish once in a while. So everybody would empty out their cupboards; it was a major fast. Then, all of a sudden, here comes Rejoice Sunday and you can eat. You can take a break from all that fasting. We had a tremendous thing. Now, they just say it's half way to Christmas and so it's like, that's kind of weak, but it works. Because what are we doing? We've changed gears. The first two weeks of advent, we were talking about the second coming of Christ. Now, these next two weeks, we'll be talking about the first coming of Christ. Preparing for Christmas; the first Christmas.

We look at our readings and we see, two of them are explicitly about rejoicing. We can use another word for rejoice and that's, joy. Joy, rejoice, same thing. We see in our first reading from Isaiah, he's trying to get the people psyched up, pumped up. He's being a cheer leader. The people have been in exile away from their homeland for fifty years. Now, they have a new king in Babylon who has said, "you can go home again." Well, most of the people, you've got fifty years, that's two generations at least. This is our house, this is our home, this is our job. "Why would I want to go back to a place I've never seen, it's all ruins, and I'd have to rebuild?" So Isaiah was saying; you need to look at it from a different perspective, you need to look at it from what **has** happened, we are being restored as a people. We can go back and restore the temple, and worship God, and have God with us, properly. So, he pumps them up with all of these positive joy filled things. Some of the people said, "Okay, we're going." And, they went back and they rebuilt Israel. Some of course stayed, but that's always the case. We get to Saint Paul's letter, and he flat out says it. Saint Paul is kind of like me; he shoots from the hip, he'll say things that need to be said. Some bishops appreciate this, some bishops don't. I haven't figured out the new one yet. We'll see. But, he comes and he says right out, "rejoice always." Well, what about the people in California? They have lost everything to a fire. Should they rejoice? Yes. Rejoice that their lives are spared. Rejoice that they'll be able to get more material possessions? No. We use the word rejoice and

we use the word joy, and we say, "It's supposed to last." I'm buying this present for myself and I'm filled with joy. But, how long are we going to be filled with joy? Not very long. Dennis the Menace in the Christmas cartoon, in the comics, he gets all the presents and he goes, "That's it?" And how many kids get presents and they play with the boxes? The joy doesn't last forever with material possessions or anything of this earth. Our joy comes from a different source. We are joyful and rejoice that Jesus Christ came. That God is here in the present, that we have a sacrifice, on the cross that enabled the doors of heaven to be opened. That God loves us all the time and that's a permanent thing. We are rejoicing because of our relationship with God. That's permanent; nothing else is. The number one cause of death among young teenagers, is suicide. Because, they can't find meaning in life. They have the toys, they have the electronics, they have all these things, and yet, they're not happy, their not rejoicing, they're not full of joy. No one has told them, there is something greater than that. Saint Paul says, "rejoice always." But then he says, "pray without ceasing." And this is the problem we've had all along. People are always asking me, "Father, how can I pray without ceasing? How can I always be praying?" Once, when I was in the seminary in Philadelphia, I met this holy monk. His name was Benedict Grochelle. He was in his habit. The thing I remember most, was as he was talking to me, his fingers were moving down the beads of his rosary. He was multi-tasking. He was praying the rosary as he talked to people. That's like splitting your brain in half, but he was doing it. And, at the same time telling me, "where have I met you before?" We've never met Father. "Yes we have!" Don't argue with a priest, I was brought up properly. So he had his way. But for most of us in this daily world, how do we pray always, pray without ceasing? Well, what is prayer? Prayer is talking to or having a conversation with God. So, we interject God in what we do. Saint Therese, the little flower, said, "do little things with great love." Great love means, you're doing it and talking to God at the same time. Now, how many people with kids, when they change their poopy diapers, have given thanks to God, for that little baby? Most of the time we call them a little name or something, because they pooped their diaper and you have to change it. Then, parents are always fighting, "well, I did it last time, you do it now." But why not while we're changing the diaper, wiping the baby, we're saying thank you God, for this child? Thank you God. Please God, I hope that this child grows up to be healthy. Thank God, and ask him for things. Talk to God and say, I love you to the child. Then we're talking to God. So we're putting God in conversation, like we do anybody else, into things we do. Most of us have a conversation going down Hunt Hwy. Most of us have the wrong kind of conversation. We need to change that. "God bless you." "May God have mercy on you." Start thinking this way instead of the words you're using. This is the way we bring God into the situation. This is the way we, pray always. People say, "Father, I find it hard to say the rosary while I'm driving." So do I. But, it's not hard to say, "oh, God, that's really good for you to do that." Or there's a beautiful woman; "oh God, you did great work over there. Yes, I can still do that. All these different ways to be creative and talk to God. In doing that, you're praying always. Then he says, "in all circumstances give thanks." "We'll, my wife just died and my son's got stage four cancer and I'm supposed to give thanks?" Yes. Why? Because, Jesus Christ, number one, came and died so that I can get to heaven, saved me from my sins. Second of all, your wife now has a better position to pray for you and straighten you out, than she did while she was living with you. Your son, can offer that up and be able to do great things in the kingdom of God. Give thanks always because God takes bad and makes it good. It's easy to say thank you when things are good. But, it's harder to say thank you when things are not going right, and yet, when we say that, then we're able to be the people that are full of joy, and our faith cannot be shaken. Recognize, God is in all things and God is going to make bad turn into good. So we give thanks for everything even though we don't understand. Even though we don't like it; we give thanks to God because God knows what He's doing. God will change the bad into good. Saint Paul gives us three ways to maintain joy, to have us rejoice in God. That's what he says. He says, "our hearts are thirsty for joy." "Rejoice in the Lord." We have to give thanks in the Lord; we have to rejoice in the Lord; we have to pray in the Lord; everything with the Lord. And the moment we take the Lord out, then we

are not going to be full of joy. We are not going to be able to rejoice that our faith is here, that we're Catholic, that we're blessed by God in so many ways, that we shouldn't let one thing get in the way. We are blessed in the Lord. The moment we start putting the Lord back in everything; rejoice in the Lord, give thanks in the Lord, pray with the Lord always. Then, and only then, will we understand the true meaning of what it is to be Christian and what Christmas is truly all about.

God bless you