

**3 Advent  
December 16, 2018**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus  
taught us the meaning of unconditional love.  
Amen**

As Father Ted said last Sunday, each Sunday in Advent has a particular emphasis. This Sunday actually has a Latin name, Gaudaytay Sunday, which means REJOICE Sunday, and it comes from the increasing feeling of joy as Christians anticipate the birth of Christ. In a high Mass the choir would sing an opening prayer, known as the Introit, which begins with the word "Rejoice." And our wonderful Epistle this morning from Paul's letter to the young church at Philippi is all about rejoicing. Hear it again:

"Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, let your requests be made known to God. And, the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Rejoice!

Today has also affectionately come to be known as "Stir up Sunday" because of the opening words of the Collect, our opening prayer..."Stir up your power O Lord, and with great might come among us."  
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If we have been truly introspective, quite honestly addressing where we need to make serious changes, as Advent calls us to do, in preparation for the coming of the Lord, then the hope is that we would have a lighter feeling by now, in expectation of the Lord being truly born into our lives, celebrated at Christmas. And on this next to the last Advent Sunday, as our Collect says: "We ask the Lord to "Come in great power and let your bountiful grace set us free." That's the intention at least, of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent.

Well, now, let's turn again to John the Baptist. I say, "Turn again to John the Baptist" because, as you know well, if you were here last Sunday, he was the subject of last Sunday's Gospel and Fr. Ted's Sermon. John was known as John the Baptizer, because he went all about calling people to a "baptism of repentance", calling everyone who could hear his voice, to change their foolish ways and repent, and be ready for the Lord to come into their lives. His message is one of urgency. He senses that time is running out. There is an immediacy to his call. He knows that the coming of the Lord is immanent, and he wants to do all he can to be sure that no one has an obstacle in their path.

The church season of Advent is intended to be a time of opportunity for us, a time to experience this message of John the Baptist. Make the way straight for Jesus to come into your lives. With that message, John was telling the people, then and now, that they are not stuck as they are. His is a message of HOPE actually. Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Nothing less. Listen to what John is saying: We are not held captive by our failures, to our decisions of the past, to our weaknesses. We can turn around. We can start over.

For us Christians, Repent is a WONDERFUL word because it says we CAN do something about the course we have taken if it does not lead us closer to our Lord. If we are on the wrong track, we can change. We may not be able to change something we already have done and we may not be able to escape some consequences of past choices, BUT we need not continue on the same destructive path; we can have a new start. Every life accumulates a certain amount of rubbish. No matter how earnestly and thoughtfully we live, we make mistakes, some more serious than others. But, the important thing is that our mistakes do not need to hold us. We CAN move on. So repentance, being absolutely honest in our hearts, becomes the door by which the Lord comes into our lives, into our hearts; it becomes the path by which we clear the way for God's love to fill us. Advent is intended as a time for us to get a fresh start in deepening our spiritual lives. It is a time for disciplining ourselves so that we can cut through distracting activities of life and embrace what really matters: Christ and the Kingdom of God and our relationship with all that.

Can we even imagine what our Holy Scripture is saying to us about this man called John the Baptist from so long ago? About how HIS life was so changed? About how he knew the difference it would be for anyone who would hear his clear call to prepare the way of the Lord?

I think John the Baptist is inspiring because he did an amazing job of preparing the way of the Lord./// And I believe, we too, are so called. .... even though we may prefer a diet other than locusts and wild honey. I think if we really heard the cry of John the Baptist, we would do all we can, in every way we can, to be serious about getting our lives in order...ready to meet the Lord.

So I ask...how is it for us? Is Jesus the one sent from God to come to us so that we will know God deeply within, as Jesus manifested God in his life? Is this what Christmas...the Incarnation ...the coming of Jesus, the Christ, means in our lives? I stand at the door, knocking," Jesus said. Will we open the door and invite him in?

This third Sunday in Advent, with its focus on the rugged prophet, John the Baptist is so important for all people to hear and to repent of their foolish ways,-- to make their way straight. That way to Christ, then and now, is letting go of all that is in the way of our welcoming the Incarnation...the coming of Jesus into our lives. This is the reason we turn our attention to John the Baptist during Advent, because what he did in the first Century is still needed in This Century. His message and the message of our lessons for today bring to mind tough questions....What should we do if we find that our lives are not really being lived as they should be? What should we do if we find that Jesus, the Christ does not occupy first place in our lives? What should we do if we realize that we are not really prepared for Christ to come into our hearts and manifest God's Love to us, and through us, into God's world?/////This third Sunday in Advent suggests that the answer is, of course, that we should do exactly what John the Baptist advised the people of his time to do. Take an inventory of our lives, and make whatever changes are necessary. We need to prepare OUR way for Christ. Jesus is not just another teacher or another hero. This is our Lord Jesus Christ and he knows us and he knows our life. ... and He wants US to know Him in our lives. This has happened so many, many times in every life that has received him. In ancient times, Saul of Tarsus was on the Jerusalem road to Damascus, carrying warrants for the arrest of Christians there, hatred seething within him. But then came Jesus, confronting Saul on that road in the noon-day sun... and Saul was never the same again. He became Saint Paul, living evidence of the power of Jesus Christ in his life.

And about a half century later, an aged Christian, also named John, was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. Because of his beliefs, this man had been stripped of his possessions and rights of citizenship. Alone, cut off, and shut away from the rest of the world, in his own wilderness, this man of faith had every reason to despair, but then came Jesus.....and John of Patmos said, "He laid his hand on me and said to me, Write..." And so he wrote the incomparable vision of victory that stands now as the final book of the Bible, the book we know as Revelation, the Revelation of John, evidence of the living, resurrected Christ. And Jesus has not stopped revealing himself to those who have sought him over the past 2,000 years. One by one Jesus gives living evidence: Yes. ...Rejoice! As St. Paul said to the early church at Philippi. "Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS! And again, I say REJOICE! The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything. But, in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

The Good News of Advent is that our mistakes do not hold us. We CAN move on toward wholeness. Acknowledging where we are really "off the mark" becomes the DOOR by which the Lord comes into our lives, into our hearts; it becomes the OPPORTUNITY by which we clear the way for God's love to fill us. Advent is a time for us to be serious about living in true union with God. John's ministry was to prepare the people to experience the Love of God made Incarnate in Jesus, the Christ. And that is still the message for us today. We are still confronted with the necessity to make changes in our lives if the way is not prepared for the Lord to come into our lives. The color of Advent is purple, symbolizing penitence. May it be that each of us will prepare for Christmas this year by conscientious soul searching, taking this message of Advent seriously, maybe for the first time. ///Search out our hearts and leave the things of darkness at the altar.////Then...as the light of the Advent Wreath grows stronger as we approach The Incarnation, may God's light of Love grow ever stronger within us.

Yes, Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us! Come Lord Jesus. We WILL REJOICE! AMEN