

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Dec. 12-13, 2020, Cycle B**

Today is Gaudete Sunday or Rejoice Sunday! But what should we be so joyful about in a world so darkened by war, poverty, famine, injustice, lack of respect for all human life, and natural calamities of every kind, and some people's lives are ruined completely by the Coronavirus and COVID-19. As we gather in this holy place to worship this evening (morning), our hearts might even be cynical, jaded, devoid of any sense of an eager expectancy for a God who so often seems just not to be present among us. In fact, it might even seem downright heartless to give ourselves over to joy when so many have no reason to smile, let alone rejoice! Yet, we hear Paul the Apostle command the Thessalonians "rejoice always!" How? Why? Simply put, because Jesus of Nazareth is the light of the world who dispels the darkness of our human condition, and offers us hope that our joy is found in God. Joy can well up within as followers of Jesus, because even in the midst of loss, pain, struggle or fear our hope assures us that our God is near, even with us in our human misery.

What is fascinating about Paul encouraging the Thessalonians to "rejoice always" is that the Thessalonians were experiencing a good deal of suffering and persecution for holding onto their faith. The Thessalonians were not having an easy time of it. One other time Paul commands a Christian community to "rejoice always," when he wrote to the Philippians! He said: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice." Why? "The Lord is near," Paul said. What is amazing is that Paul writes words of joy to the Philippians when he is imprisoned, persecuted, and deathly sick. Clearly, rejoicing is not some vapid command to repress or deny suffering and just think happy thoughts. No, joy has to do with knowing that we are lamps that carry light within us that is lit by He who is the light that fills the world.

Once again, we hear about John the Baptist this weekend. We can take our lesson of joy from him. If anyone would have reason for despair it was John the Baptist – he was taunted, he was persecuted; eventually John was thrown into prison and finally beheaded. But through it all the Baptist maintained his hope and joy for being a witness who came to testify to the Light who dispels our darkness. When questioned, John maintained that I am not the Messiah, nor am I The Prophet, and I am not Elijah. I am but a "voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight for the way of the Lord." John was the best man who rejoiced at decreasing, so that Christ the groom, and true light, may increase. John was thrilled with joy that he was a lamp, burning bright with the light of the one coming after me!

With the Baptist, we too rejoice, even in the gloom of our darkened world, for we too are lamps through which the Light of the World shines forth, offering the World hope that God is near, in our midst, transforming our world into the eternal joy of His Kingdom of Light and Truth! So, Rejoice!