

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT: *GAUDETE SUNDAY***First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11****Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24****Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28****REJOICE ALWAYS!**

The Third Sunday of Advent is commonly known as *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete*, in Latin, means Rejoice. Today we hear these words in both the first and second reading. Isaiah says, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God..." In his final exhortation to the Thessalonians, as we have heard in the second reading, Paul says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances". This is the message of Advent: Rejoice always. Not once, not twice but always. Why should we rejoice? Is there any reason for rejoicing? We can say there are many reasons for us to rejoice.

First we rejoice because advent is coming to an end and Christmas is just a week from now. We have prepared ourselves for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Son of God. We cannot wait but receive him amongst us. *Maranatha!* "Come Lord Jesus, come".

Secondly we rejoice because God has loved us so much that He has given us His only Son to become our saviour. This is the greatest gift God has given to each one of us.

Thirdly, we rejoice because God has become human like us. God comes to be among us. We rejoice because God has come into being and has become the life and light of the people. We rejoice because through God's own Son our sins are forgiven. We rejoice because what God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ is the good news. What do we do when we have good news?

At midnight on Friday September 23rd, the Zambian people received the news they had been waiting for, for close to three days. The results of the elections of the new president, members of parliament and councilors were announced. If that were not good news, then how would we explain the crowds that swamped all the main roads and streets in Lusaka and other parts of the country? How would we explain the scores of people who were at the high court who seemed more interested in seeing a new president sworn into office than what he had to say, even when he challenged every Zambian to brace him/herself for hard work? Wasn't that good news? Did the people have a reason to rejoice?

The September 23rd joy will be incomplete unless the majority of all those Zambians who took to the streets to rejoice are assured a decent standard of living. Many of them do not have access to food, decent housing, health care, education and transport. Their monthly costs are usually more than their basic income. A people hungry for good news is what they are. Only a decent standard of living will be a cause to rejoice.

What do we do with good news?

Good news spreads. Good news is life-giving. Good news can be infectious. Good news makes us rejoice. Good news is for the people who receive it first but also for our neighbors. Once again as Zambians, we have shown that we can be the custodians of good news to our neighboring countries and also to the rest of Africa. We proclaim first to ourselves and second to the rest of Africa, peace, love and our young and growing democracy. This is our Good news and we rejoice and want to rejoice with all peace loving friends and neighbours.

We too are and can become the good news

Jesus does not only bring the good news but he is also the good news. Since he comes among us to be one like us, he too invites us to become the good news to other people. How can we become the good news? One way to become the good news to other people is through advocacy. This is a Christian call because Proverbs 31:8-9 calls us to “speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy”. This is an option for the poor. This is Jesus’ option. It is our option. Therefore, in the work of advocacy, we should strive first to affirm and protect the sanctity of human life as a gift from God and build a society’s respect for the people who most need protection and support. These include the unborn, children, the poor, the sick and the elderly. This is the good news. Our doing of this is a reason for genuine rejoicing.

Therefore, at the end of this advent season, God too cannot wait to break the news about the coming of His Son. We have prepared for this good news for the past three weeks now, yet God has been preparing for this from the beginning for as we hear in the prologue “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. God sent great prophets to prepare for his coming. Today we have heard how John the Baptist, a man sent from God, witnesses and testifies to the light, so that all of us might believe in Jesus (1:4). Jesus is the true light and He enlightens everyone. He comes into the world for this purpose: To enlighten all. He comes to the world to give it life. So the world comes into being through Him although it does not know him. He comes to what is his own but not all his people accept him. However, all those who receive him and believe in his name, he gives them power to become children of God born of the will of God (Jn 1:9-12).

Blessed are we who receive and believe in him for we become what we ought to be and that is, God’s children. This is the good news of Christmas. This is our great reason to REJOICE! Rejoice in the Lord always and again we say; REJOICE!

Questions for Reflection

1. What good news do we have in our families, communities, Church and Country?
2. What are we doing with the good News of the Lord?
3. What is the Good News that Christmas brings this year?

Sketch: John’s Witness

Let two people, a man and a woman, act as Christian leaders in a community. They are exemplary leaders. They preach the good news both by word and actions. Many people, Christians and non-Christians, begin to love and admire their work and lifestyle. Despite their fame, these leaders still remain humble and simple in their mission as Christians and leaders.

Community Prayers

- Loving God, may this advent season help us to find the true joy that comes with the birth of your Son Jesus. *Lord hear us! Lord graciously hear us.*
- Loving God, through the example of John the Baptist, we pray that we too may become better witnesses of Christ in our communities. *Lord hear us! Lord graciously hear us.*
- Loving God, we pray that we may have the courage to openly spread the Good News of Christ. *Lord hear us! Lord graciously hear us.*