

## Sample Homily

### December 14, 2013, Third Sunday of Advent

Mass readings: Is 61:1-2a, 10-11 / 1 Thes 5:16-24 / Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Today we are celebrating Gaudete Sunday. The theme of rejoicing permeates our celebration, reminding us of the real joy that lies at the heart of Advent. And we are given a firm directive—*Gaudete! Rejoice!* What makes you joyful? We can all think of things that are causes for jubilation. But do we find ourselves rejoicing here and now, in this place, at this liturgy?

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah gives us a list of things to rejoice about: liberty for captives, healing for the brokenhearted, justice among nations (Is 61:1, 11). All are causes for real joy. And Paul tells the Thessalonians how to respond to the gifts of God: “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks” (1 Thes 5:16-18).

What about Paul’s exhortation to give thanks in all circumstances? It can be very challenging to rejoice at God’s mysterious ways when life is difficult or painful. Can we really be expected to be joyful and thankful when we feel in the dark? We don’t always see clearly what God is doing, which can cause us to question more than to express our joy. And yet, Paul tells us to rejoice, pray, and be grateful—no matter what our circumstances.

What does joyful gratitude look like? We find a clue in the figure of John the Baptist. At the Jordan, John was on fire with the message of the imminent arrival of God’s salvation in the person of Jesus. John saw clearly the great gift that God was giving to Israel. But gratitude doesn’t stop with looking at the gift and rejoicing for what it will mean for oneself; gratitude points to the source of the gift.

When the people questioned John about his identity, they were focused on him and his power to inspire repentance by his fiery preaching. But when they asked, “Who are you?”, John directed them away from himself and toward the light that God was sending into the world. And by his witness, John himself became a light to others, pointing them to the Christ.

As Christians, we are each able to answer the same question that was put to John. *Who am I? I am loved and blessed by God. I am a joyful, grateful response who points to the source of the gifts I have been given.* Every time I do that, I bring Christ’s presence to the world by my own living of the Gospel. John was a voice in the desert, a bright light pointing to Christ. So, too, each one of us is called to be light—a lamp that illuminates the way to Jesus for others.

Who have been the lights in our Church’s life, leading us to see Christ more clearly? We can think of the many Catholic sisters, brothers, and priests whose lives testify daily to the light of Christ. We have met them in so many places—in our parishes, Catholic schools and hospitals, as parish ministers, as those who run homeless shelters and food pantries, and in countless other places—bringing joy and new life into situations where people have lost hope. Perhaps you can recall a particular sister or brother who nurtured the seeds of faith that had been planted by your parents and grandparents or guided you through a difficult time in your life. Perhaps he or she was instrumental in deepening your own relationship with God or in helping you to embrace a life of service to others.

Today is the Retirement Collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious. We are joining parishes across the nation in offering prayers and financial support for the more than 35,000 sisters, brothers, and priests in religious orders past age 70. Another part of the collection is for the retirement needs of our diocesan priests. Many of these selfless women and men continue to minister—sometimes well into their 80s and even 90s—doing whatever they can to help the People of God. Others are frail and need care. Nearly all spent their lives serving for small stipends. As a result, many religious communities lack adequate savings to support eldercare. So I ask for your prayers. I also ask you to be as generous as you can. Know that women and men religious, as well as our senior priests, are exceedingly grateful for every dollar shared and that they pray for you every day.

So, today, what is your greatest cause for joy? For what are you grateful? And how will you respond? Let us follow Paul’s advice to rejoice, to give thanks, and to pray. A wise person once

observed that it would be enough if the only prayer you ever said was “thank you.” Let us all make that joyful prayer of thanks to God today and every day. How? By truly being the light of Christ in our world.

*Adapted from Retirement Fund for Religious, [www.retiredreligious.org](http://www.retiredreligious.org)*