

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> 2023; Cycle - B**  
**Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 18-28**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent is known as “*Gaudete in Domino semper*” means - **Rejoice in the Lord always**. It is a command taken from Paul’s letter to the 1Thessalonians 5:16 which we have just listened to. *It is a positive command which we have to keep at all times and in all circumstances, in our good time and bad time*. Paul asks his community, “**Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ.**” The immediate reason for our rejoicing in this Advent is the proximity of the great celebration of Christmas. Unfortunately, many give emphasis to the material joy of this season. To remain unhappy is lot easier and if wanted, we can find daily 10 reasons to be sad; whereas to rejoice in all situations is a hard decision which we have to make. Among the most neglected of all our Christian obligations is *the obligation to rejoice in the Lord*. Just as the Word of God commands us to believe in God and to love him, so does it command us to rejoice? Yes, it does.

Last Sunday we heard the prophecy of Isaiah in the Babylonian exilic situation. This Sunday’s reading is too from Isaiah in the post-exilic period in the home land. When the people came back with high expectations, they didn’t find anything there which they had left behind and they were disheartened and unhappy. So Isaiah gives them the joyful news that he is anointed by the Lord to bring the glad tidings of freedom to them from all bondages. Here Isaiah means mainly the spiritual joy and freedom which he can give them. Finally he concludes saying, “**I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my heart.**” He does not say that he is joyful because he got the freedom and came back. He is not unhappy either to see the desolate land. He rejoices in the presence of God who chose him. This is the same attitude we find in Mary. After the annunciation of the angel about the birth of Jesus, Mary says in her Magnificat, “**My spirit finds joy in God my savior.**” She does not say that she rejoices over her divine motherhood; **rather she rejoices in her savior.**

*Today’s readings show us the great truth that the true joy comes from the fact that we are chosen by God and the trust we have in the Lord that he will be with us always.* Humanly speaking the Apostles didn’t have any reason to be happy during their missionary endeavor. For often they were persecuted, flogged and driven out of their places. **But they rejoiced in the Lord.** The realization that the Lord was with them, gave them the joy even when they were persecuted. Despite the oppositions and persecutions, St. Paul could ask with great joy and pride, “*Who will separate us from the*

*love of Christ? Will anguish or distress, or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword. Yet in all this we are more than conquerors because of him who loved us.”* (Rom. 8: 35, 37). For Paul the experience of **Christ’s presence with** him was the source of his joy and courage.

It is the inborn tendency in us by which we seek joy and pleasure in everything we have and we do. Many think that the material wealth is the real source of joy. So they try to amass as many things as possible and participate in many events and activities which may give them temporary pleasure. Soon enough they feel bored and unhappy. Some seek their joy in earthly recognition and power. As soon as they lose their position or power, they are disappointed. Many people don’t enjoy what they have; rather are sad about what they don’t have. Very often you and I belong to this category of people. We see only *the half empty glass, not half filled*. So it is clear that the source of real joy is not something material; rather it is spiritual. **The source of genuine joy is God Himself. I should rejoice that I am the son or daughter of a loving God; I should rejoice that Jesus has called me to be his disciple; I should rejoice, for Jesus loves me with all my shortcomings.**

We may spend thousands of dollars on luxury items and comforts; though our houses are filled, hearts will remain empty; if God is not with us the real joy will be far away from us. But the person who has absolute trust in the Lord will rejoice even in the absence of material goods and physical comforts. *Mother Theresa comments on joy in these words, “Joy is -being with God in Christ, loving as he loves, helping as he helps, giving as he gives, serving as he serves, rescuing as he rescues, being with Him 24 hours.”* So, in short, if we have a place for Christ in our hearts and in our families we will have the real joy and no one will be able to take it away from us; even the lack of material affluence or good health will never take away our joy of heart. **Yes, with Christ we are conquerors and without him we are losers.**