

**Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2020**

***Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy
and keep on choosing it everyday
(Fr. Henry J.M. Nouwen)***

Today, we have reached the middle of the Advent Season, “*Gaudete*” Sunday. The Sunday of “*Rejoicing*”. Today, we take a break in our penitential preparation for the coming of our Lord at Christmas. Today, we are called to experience JOY. Throughout Sacred Scripture, we find many reminders of the joy we can find in the coming of Jesus, past, present, and future. He came as a babe born in a manger; He is here with us now; He will come again.

The story of His birth in the small town of Bethlehem is proclaimed through the Christmas story at this time each year. In the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 2, verse 10, the joy of the coming of the Good Shepherd was proclaimed by the heavenly hosts to the shepherds tending their sheep by night. The angels proclaimed joy on earth and in heaven at the incarnation of the promised Messiah. His birth signaled a change for humankind. His birth brought hope. His birth proclaimed joy.

As we enter into our celebration, the opening words of the Mass, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,*” signal the joy of His presence. Grace, love, communion promise the joy we can know by the “*Real Presence*” of Christ in our midst. Here today, each of us, should see this holy place, this holy ground within these walls, as the happiest place on earth, for Jesus, our true joy, resides here. Peter’s first letter, chapter 1, verse 8 tells us: “*For though you have not seen Him, you love Him. In Him also, though you do not see Him, you now believe. And in believing, you shall exult with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*”

In a few minutes, from this Eucharistic Table, we will each “*throne Him in our hand, pillow Him on our tongue, nestle Him in our flesh*” (from a homily by Fr. Walter Burkhardt). According to the words of Jesus as recorded by St. John the Evangelist, “*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him*” (Jn 6:56). By this act of acceptance, the joy proclaimed to the shepherds comes to us once again and resides in each of us.

Each year in our Advent celebrations we tend to focus on the coming of Jesus at Christmas. In this way of thinking there is a paradox. Advent proclaims this waiting for Jesus at his birth; yet, He is already here. And still, we have the promise of His coming again in glory to receive us unto Himself. Jesus told his disciples, as recorded in John 16:22, “*Therefore, you also, indeed, have sorrow now. But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. And no one will take away your joy from you.*” This promise is the source of our present hope; it is the promise of the fullness of our joy to come.

Today, we take time to celebrate our joy, past, present and future. It is appointed for us to choose joy, to choose Jesus. Let us continue, during this time of Advent, this time of preparation, to live in hope for the joy of His birth, the joy of His presence, and the joy of His promised return.