

Reflections for the Third Sunday of Advent ~ 12 December 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

This third Sunday of Advent has traditionally been called “Gaudete Sunday” – “gaudete” is the Latin word meaning “rejoice.” Today, the third candle to be lighted on the Advent Wreath is the pink candle to reflect this special designation. The priest celebrating Mass will wear rose-coloured vestments rather than purple.



Today’s readings in the Liturgy of the Word are filled with reasons for rejoicing. The greatest wonder is that, in the first reading, it is God who is rejoicing! Even more astounding, God is rejoicing in us! “The Lord God will rejoice over you with gladness, will renew you in love; will exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph 3:17). Can we even imagine that God would sing with joy, dance with delight, because of us! And yet, that is exactly what this word from the prophet Zephaniah is saying. Ask yourself, “What is so good, so wonderful, about me that God rejoices

in me?” Ask the same question about your family, your circle of friends, your place on Earth. Trust that this is so. And imagine God singing and dancing in that goodness.

The Jesuit John Foley says this beautifully, “God’s gladness sings out joyfully at every instant, and God’s song is the earth, the galaxies, the people and plants and chemicals and soaring hawks and encircling planets, droplets of dew and heavy black holes, youthful beauties, ancient wisdoms, and everything else that exists. In other words, we are God’s song.”

All four readings then give us reason for our rejoicing – God loves us so much that God chooses to dwell with us. In the time of the Israelites and in the time of Jesus, people believed that there were many gods. They believed that their god who chose them loved them. But for the Israelites and later Jews and Christians not only does the God who chose us love us but, even more, our God chooses to dwell among us. In the short reading from Zephaniah, we read not once but twice, “The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst” (Zeph 3:15, 17). In today’s psalm which does not come from the book of Psalms but is taken from the prophet Isaiah, we sing, “Great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel” (Is 12:6). In the letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us, “The Lord is near” (Phil 4:5). John the Baptist



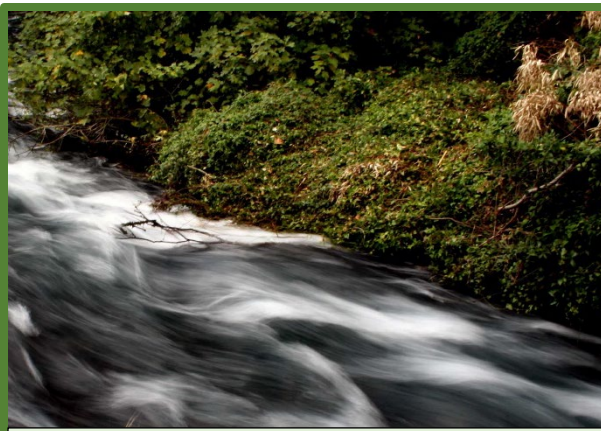
reminds his disciples and us, “One who is more powerful than I is coming” (Lk 3:16).

This sense of God dwelling among us is the name given to Jesus, *Emmanuel* – God with us . Within the Jewish tradition, one of the names of God is *Shekinah*, meaning “dwelling” (the dwelling of the divine Presence among us). This week of the Cosmic Advent Wreath, we celebrate the incarnation of Jesus the Christ. Teilhard de Chardin reminds us, “Christ and Jesus are not exactly the same. In Jesus, God’s presence became more obvious and believable in the world. By his incarnation (the Christ) inserted himself not just into our humanity, but into the universe which supports humanity. The presence of the incarnate word . . . shines at the heart of all things.” God is present in the heart of all things – humanity, Earth, the universe, the cosmos. For this reason, we rejoice.



The poet and spiritual leader, Edwina Gateley, echoes this indwelling of God in her little poem:

God is soaked in our world.
God's Spirit lives and breathes in and through all that is.
We are lost only when we do not understand
that God is already with and in each one of us.
Our task is recognition of God's initiative to be at home in us—
acceptance of God-With-Us.
Then we cannot but be glad.



Spring at Tel Dan, one of sources of the Jordan River, where Elizabeth spent the summer of 1979 at an archaeological dig.

A second reason for our rejoicing is that our God, who created, knows our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and still loves us and forgives us when we turn away from our own goodness. In Zephaniah, the prophet tells us, “Rejoice and exult with all your heart. . . the Lord has taken away the judgments against you.” The psalm from Isaiah brings us one of the most beautiful phrases from the whole of Scripture, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Is 12:3). Paul writes, “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil

4:6). Thomas Merton describes Advent in this way, “The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ.”

In Luke’s Gospel, John anticipates the coming of Jesus with a powerful expression of diversity and inclusion. As John proclaimed the good news to the people, they ask the question, “What should we do?” (Lk 3:10). John sees each one for who they are, knows what each one professes to do and who they profess to be. Then he responds differently to each one in their uniqueness. God and Jesus will answer each one of us in the same way when we ask the question, “What should I do? What should we do?” We are created in our uniqueness, and we respond out of our uniqueness. Even more, God rejoices in our uniqueness. How can we not rejoice in our own uniqueness? May this Advent be a moment in which you rejoice in the gift that you are – a gift that causes God to sing and dance with joy!

Thus, Gaudete Sunday is a reminder to us, no matter what our pain or uncertainty or sense of frailty or sense of inadequacy, God never ceases to love us. Meister Eckhart writes, “Whatever our way of life may be, we must not cease to progress; this has been true for everyone, however far he or she may have advanced. Above all else, know this: Be prepared at all times for the gifts of God and be ready always for new ones. For God is a thousand times more ready to give than we are to receive.” Let these words echo in your heart this day.



For Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley, this Gaudete Sunday brings even greater reasons to rejoice. In one of those rare moments of synchronicity, this Sunday falls on December 12, the anniversary of the founding day of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy. on 12 December 1831, Sister Catherine McAuley, Anna Maria Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley made their profession in Dublin, Ireland, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy was born. For 190 years, this blessed charism of God’s mercy has been handed down from Sister to Sister to all the Sisters living today. The Sisters have shared their love for Mercy with so many from their own families to those among whom they minister to those who share their journey in Mercy to Earth who has held them in her embrace. They have received Mercy in its fullness from across forty-four countries in which they have lived and ministered. They are rediscovering Mercy in new and life-giving ways every single day. For those Sisters of Mercy (in Canada and in Peru) who received the charism through the hands and heart of Frances Creedon, they promised this year one

more way of living God’s gift: ***Mercy ~ Imaging the Face of God in all Creation . . . Misericordiando: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación.***

The third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Foundation Day – this is a day for all of us to rejoice in the gifts that God gives us each and every day. “What should we do?” Perhaps these words from [Thom Shuman](#) give us one more answer to our question:

If you come so
those thirsting for hope
 will find it gushing out of the taps,
those cursed by the world
 will be embraced in your arms of love,
that the despair which overwhelms so many
 will be gathered with the chaff and used to warm the homeless,
those who have lived on the scraps we toss into the trash
 will be at the head table of your feast,
 and every one, every last one of us will find our way home;
well then, I will wait,
 and while waiting, I will rejoice,
 and while rejoicing, I will make this great news known.

May each one of us find the way, through our own unique gifts and circumstances, to make this great news known. May each one of us find the way today and every day to truly find joy, find delight, find hope in our world.

Happy Sunday! Happy Foundation Day!

