

Today we celebrate the 3rd Sunday in Advent – Gaudete Sunday – **REJOICE** Sunday. And what is the cause of our rejoicing? **CHRISTMAS** is almost here!

Yes, that time of year when we prepare lavish meals for visiting families, and prepare the yard and house with fancy lighted decorations, and put up the lighted Christmas tree.

This is the time of year when we celebrate the arrival of St Nick as he drops off gifts at all of our homes; when the kids try to stay up late to get a glimpse of the merry old man, and his sleigh pulled by a team of reindeer; when we older folk break out the eggnog and offer a toast of peace and goodwill to mankind. Only to be followed the next few days by multiple trips to the stores to exchange much of what Santa left us under the tree.

With all the festiveness our secular world places around Christmas it's no wonder so **many** have forgotten, or may not have learned, that the season of Advent and Christmas is not about the person of Santa Claus, but the person of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

All the colorful lights are a nice touch as the nights can be so dark and bleak during this time of year, and a little light can be so reassuring and comforting on a cold winter's night. It's that light we see around us on the trees and the homes that we **need** to bring **into** our hearts to dispel the darkness within us.

I think we express love for our families when do all this decorating, when we take the time to do something out of the ordinary to brighten up our little worlds, especially for the littlest of us all. Yet all this decorating is for **show**, not substance. We need to make our **inner self** shine so that the joy we share on the outside is the joy we truly have on the inside.

John the Baptist tells the people what they can do to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Share what you have with those who have not: food, clothing, shelter. We do that here at St Joe's with

the "Giving Tree", "Toys for Tots", the putting together of food baskets and the gathering of winter coats, hats, and mittens, as well as giving to Hospitality House, Lily Sparrow House, and St Vincent de Paul as we care for and shelter the homeless.

John tells us not to cheat others, just to take payment for what is due. But on the other side of that coin we should not expect to withhold from others what they have earned. He also tells us not to be bullies, not to extort from others, not to lie. And maybe the toughest thing for us to change is the false sense of our own self-worth – to be satisfied with our wages. Dissatisfaction can easily lead us to envy and hatred, and take us into a dark recess of our soul which can be very hard to escape.

John the Baptist preached repentance, a conversion of heart, to make us aware that the light of God is to shine within us; that we are to be a welcoming home within which our Lord can reside. And what better way to push out the darkness within us then to come to confession, to empty our spirit of all that holds us back or fills us with pain, consternation, and distrust. This is **TRUE** preparation for the coming of the Savior. Jesus is the **TRUE** substance who brings us light, peace, and joy.

"Brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: REJOICE! The Lord is near." The words of St Paul are correct, the Lord is truly near, and at communion He is more than near, He is **WITHIN** us, a part of us, as we share in His Body and Blood and become one with Him in this Eucharist. And as he nourishes us he **strengthens** us to do his will, the will of the Father, to turn our backs on what is evil and to raise up others from despair.

So let us rejoice that the Lord is near. Let us continue our festive preparations to celebrate the greatest birth the world has ever known, the birth of the Christ, the Messiah, the King of Kings, our Lord and Savior – Jesus. Rejoice, brothers and sisters. I say it again: rejoice.