

Homily – Third Sunday of Advent 2011 (B)ⁱ

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As I said, this is a special Sunday; this Third Sunday in Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*. “Gaudete” is the Latin word that means, “rejoice.” That’s why the Advent Wreath has a different color. And I am sure you also have noticed that the Scripture readings and the prayers of today’s Mass talk a lot about *joy* and *rejoicing*.

It is beautiful to see that during this Advent season, that is a time of expectation, penance and conversion, has this specific Sunday as Christmas approaches, so that we all rejoice in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our prayer at the start of this Holy Mass, we asked God for the grace to know the *joy* of his salvation and to celebrate our salvation always with “glad *rejoicing*.”

And for our responsorial song today, we were praying the Magnificat of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her words: “My spirit *rejoices* in God my Savior.”

So it is a beautiful Sunday as we stop and rejoice in a special way in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The joy we feel in this Advent season is Mary’s own joy. We rejoice with her because our God is coming down from heaven to save us and to be close to us. We are joyful because Jesus Christ wants to share our human life with us and he invites us to share in his divine life.

I have been thinking about what it means that Jesus wants to come to be with us. That’s what we celebrate on Christmas Day. And that is why this Sunday is so special. It reminds us again of the reason for this holy season of Advent. It is a time to wait, a time of expectation in the coming of our Lord.

When we think about it, we are capable of understanding that God has a plan for humanity. That God has a plan of love for each of our lives. That he has created us to be happy. And that we find our real happiness, our joy, only in him.

That is also one of the lessons from today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah. The prophet says:

*I rejoice heartily in the Lord,
In my God is the joy of my soul,
for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation.*

So my brothers and sisters, that's what Advent and Christmas are all about. They are about God's plan of love for history — and for each one of us.

God so loved the world, that he sends his Son to raise us from the poverty of sin and death. To liberate us from captivity to pride and selfishness. To heal our hearts so we can be holy, so we can love God and love one another. So we can live as children of God!

That is why this is a joyful season, a joyful time. Because we are children of God. Because we are able by his grace to be made holy — in spirit, soul and body.

That is also what St. Paul tells us in the second reading for today's Mass: "Rejoice *always!* Pray *without ceasing!* In *all circumstances*, give thanks — for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

Now St. Paul, and we all know this, as he is encouraging us to be happy and rejoice, he doesn't mean that we Christians are never going to feel some sorrow or grief or sadness. We all know that that's part of our life. And some of us know that very deeply. Because we go through difficult times sometimes. These days, especially, I'm thinking of the economy in our society. Some of the difficult times are because somebody in our family, or we ourselves, go through an illness. Some times it is because we feel rejected by society. There are many ways in which we experience the reality of sadness and sorrow and pain.

But we know, as Jesus told us, that we have to count the price of being his disciples. So we know that when we have to suffer, Jesus is asking us to take up our cross and he is telling us also that if we really are following him, we are going to encounter suffering and pain.

But when we know the love of Jesus Christ — when we know that he is close to us, that he is always with us in our daily walk, when we understand what it means that Jesus is coming to earth on Christmas Day — then we see all of those difficult times in a new light. Because we learn how to participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ and then we feel the love of God in our lives.

That is why our Christian joy which we are talking about this Sunday in our Eucharist is very deep. It doesn't depend on some emotional joy or satisfaction. It is the joy of knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ It is the joy of

believing what St. Paul tells us today — that God will always give us the grace we need to accomplish the purposes of his will.

So my brothers and sisters, today and during these coming days as we prepare for the joyful celebration of Christmas, let us ask for the grace to understand that real joy comes from knowing and loving Jesus Christ. That will be a beautiful grace for this coming Christmas.

Finally, our Gospel reading for today presents to us with the person and the figure of St. John the Baptist. He is a beautiful model of what it means to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ.

We heard in this passage of the Gospel how the Pharisees and priests went to talk to John the Baptist and they ask him whether or not he is the Messiah or the prophet Elijah. It is an interesting conversation and I'm sure you noticed, that in responding to them, St. John the Baptist never tells them his name. They even ask him, "Who are you?"

He also didn't provide them with any personal details about his life. So he doesn't try to make himself sound important. He doesn't say anything about his own ideas or his own objectives. For John the Baptist, the only thing that matters is Jesus Christ and leading people to him.

John the Baptist identifies himself only as an instrument of Jesus Christ. He calls himself "the voice," the one who has come to prepare the way of Jesus and his Gospel.

My brothers and sisters, this is a beautiful example of humility and discipleship. Like St. John the Baptist, we should try to be a "voice" in our lives for Jesus' Gospel and teachings.

Because, as St. John the Baptist says to the Pharisees in today's passage of the Gospel, "There is One among you whom you do not recognize."

And we know, sadly, that this is still true. Jesus Christ is among us. He is near to us. He is with us. He is especially present in the Blessed Sacrament. We receive him in Holy Communion. But, isn't it true that so many people out there do not recognize Jesus Christ. They don't even know about him, sometimes.

So this is an important part of our discipleship. Being like St. John the Baptist, the voice of Jesus Christ, to prepare the way of the Lord. Helping the people around us to learn, to know and to love Jesus Christ. Like St. John the Baptist did, we need to help our neighbors to recognize the presence of Jesus Christ among us. We need to tell them the beautiful truth that God loves them and that he has a plan for their lives.

In this season of Advent, the expectation and preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to be like St. John the Baptist, helping people.

Because it is so obvious that we are preparing for something — with all the Christmas trees and the lights, and *Las Posadas* in a few days, and everything else that we have here in this Advent season in the different Masses, in the different cultures — it is a wonderful time to really help people, to remind them about what is happening in these days.

Once again we have the opportunity to contemplate God who wants to be with us in the person, life and teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So as we draw nearer to Christmas, let us keep trying to grow closer every day to Jesus Christ. Let's have a conversation with him, with Mary our Blessed Mother, with St. Joseph. Let's try to learn more about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, through our reading of sacred Scriptures. Let us try to be especially close to him when we receive him in Holy Communion. Let us try to look for the grace of God that comes to us through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a beautiful preparation for receiving Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.

Let us really try to respond to all of his graces in our lives, so we can really prepare our hearts to welcome him on Christmas Day.

Tomorrow we celebrate the beautiful feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. So let us ask the Virgen del Tepeyac to keep us company as we try to walk with her Son, Jesus and to bring others to know his love and his salvation.

ⁱ Readings: Isa. 61:1–2a, 10–11; Luke 1:46–50, 53–54; 1 Thess. 5:16–24; John 1:6–8, 19–28.

ⁱⁱ Rom. 8:18, 28, 31, 38–39.