

3rd Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) – JOY: That Can't Be Taken Away

- I. This is Gaudete Sunday — Rejoice Sunday. The birth of Christ is close. The rose candle is lit. The vestments change color. The entire mass shifts tone.
- II. My friends, today the Church invites us to something bold — **JOY**. Not the fragile kind... that leaves us as soon as the next difficult moment happens. I'm talking about the deep, unshakable, God-given kind. **Well, give me some of that, right??!!**
- III. Why and how can this happen?
 - a. Because the Church knows something that we sometimes forget and I think we need to be reminded of it. And it is this:
 - i. Joy is not the absence of any problems; joy is the presence of God. That's what we are invited to this weekend.
- IV. Joy is not based on circumstances — **it's based on a relationship**. Happiness comes and goes depending on what's happening around us. But **joy**, joy remains, because it comes from **WHO is with us**. Emmanuel – God with us. So,
 - a. You can lose a job **and still have joy**.
 - b. You can face illness **and still have joy**.
 - c. You can have unanswered questions and still have joy — because God has not left you.
- V. When God is present, something inside you becomes steady and anchored, and peaceful.
- VI. Today's readings — especially from Isaiah and Matthew — show us that God brings joy in the **most unlikely places**.
 - a. First, Isaiah tells us: "The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom."
 - i. The desert? Deserts are places where, seemingly, nothing grows. It's barren, dry, silent, and some might say, appears DEAD.

ii. And yet, Isaiah tells us, “That’s exactly where God will bring joy.”

b. And I know that some of us might feel like a desert:

- spiritually dry
- exhausted from life
- anxious about life
- grieving
- feeling far from God

VII. But Isaiah’s promise is this: **Your desert is not the end of the story. It’s the place where God is about to do something amazing!**

Story:

Did you know that there is a flower called the **Rose of Jericho – The Resurrection plant**. It grows in the deserts of the Middle East.

For months — even years — it looks dead. Brown. Curled up. Lifeless.

But when water touches it, the plant unfolds into a bright green flower within a few hours.

I hear that tour guides use it to teach an important lesson: “Nothing is ever too dead for God to bring it back to life.”

VIII. One drop of God’s grace — and our desert places will bloom again.

i. Joy is what happens when we let God step in.

b. Isaiah today speaks of a time when deserts are blooming and the lame are leaping.

i. That’s not “positive thinking.” That’s the grace of God showing up.

c. Joy is what “flowers” in the soul when we let God to enter the places that feel dry, empty, or exhausted.

i. The first Sunday of Advent, we were shaken awake to begin the season.

- ii. The second Sunday of Advent, we cleared the clutter to ready our hearts for His birth.
- iii. And this Sunday, we Rejoice.

d. It's what happens when grace touches your fear, when hope touches your sadness, when the Lord touches the very place you thought was dead.

IX. And look at this, even saints have “desert moments!” In the Gospel, John the Baptist is in prison. He sends messengers to Jesus asking: “Are you the one who is to come? Am I suffering in this prison for you?”

a. Jesus doesn't shame him. Instead, He says:

i. “Tell John what you see: the blind see, the lame walk... and the poor have the good news preached to them.”

b. In other words: “Look at the signs of life. Even in the darkest moments, there is life. Look at the signs of life here at Holy Spirit! Joy is already growing. The Kingdom is already blooming.” The energy is palpable!

i. Sometimes we just need to look again at our own lives. God is moving... even when we don't feel it.

X. So, what does Gaudete Sunday ask of us?

- a. Not fake smiles.
- b. Not pretending everything is okay.
- c. But trusting that joy is on the way — because Jesus is on the way.

i. Ask God for one drop of grace.

XI. Joy **is not** a mood. Joy **is not** a “feeling.” JOY IS A SAVIOR. And He is coming. And this is a **Joy**, cannot be taken away...