

## Reflection for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication from our God. Isaiah 61: 1-2*

Clearly from the first two verses of our First Reading this Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday something is different the focus this Sunday has changed from the previous two Sundays of Advent. This Sunday takes its name from the Latin word “*Gaudete*” which is rendered “*Rejoice*” in English. The Entrance Antiphon for this Sunday is “*Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, Gaudete. Dominus enim prope est. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.*” It is from the Entrance Antiphon that this Sunday receives its name, but this Antiphon provides more this just the name for this Third Sunday of Advent.

As one enters the Church and sees that this is the Sunday that the rose or pink candle of the Advent Wreath will be lit, this Sunday already has a different tone and purpose than the prior two Sundays of Advent, when a purple candle on the Advent Wreath was lit. The Church decorations for this Sunday might include rose or pink banners and the Priest and Deacon might even wear rose or pink vestments for the celebration of the Mass. All these changes provide numerous indicators that there is a shift in message and focus for this Sunday.

The first two verses of our First Reading this Sunday can help us explore and understand the message and meaning of this third Sunday of the Advent Season. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah covers the time of the Babylonian Exile, and the return to the promised land. Isaiah is the Prophet to the People of Israel in an incredibly challenging and difficult time. The people of God had lost their way and had lost their land and independence. They had to journey back to God before they would be able to journey back to the promised land. In our reading this Sunday from the book of the Prophet Isaiah we are hearing about the joy of returning to the promised land and a year of favor, the jubilee year that is celebrated because of the journey home. The origins of the jubilee year are found in the book of Leviticus 25:8-13, it is celebrated every 50 years or because of some event, such as returning to the promised land. In this jubilee year, all debts are forgiven all property is returned to the original owner. There is no sowing, or reaping it is a holy year and a time to refocus to rejoice.

In the Catholic Church the celebration of the Jubilee year dates back to 1300 when Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed a Holy Year, from this point forward an ordinary Jubilee Year is celebrated every 25 or 50 years. Under Pope Francis the Catholic Church declared an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy for 2015-2016. The last ordinary Jubilee Year was declared by Pope John Paul II in 2000. For the Catholic Church, the Jubilee year is a time of prayer and pilgrimage, it is a time to journey closer to God.

We discover ourselves today, celebrating Gaudete Sunday and we are being reminded by our First Reading of the Jubilee Year, the Year of Favor from the Lord. What we can draw from our readings this Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent is that today is a time to rejoice we are halfway through the Season of joyful preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior. May we take the time this Sunday to reflect on our Advent journey to date and if need be let us refocus our Advent journey so that it is a time that prepares us for the celebration of the Birth of our Lord and Savior. This Sunday is also a time to rejoice to take a momentary pause from this journey of preparation and just be reminded of what this journey is all about, which is embracing God’s love in our lives and in the world.