

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom



Advent #3 - Exultation

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent – Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” is Latin for rejoice. This Sunday is named Gaudete Sunday because those are the opening words of the Mass, the Entrance Antiphon. The words come from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! The Lord is near.” [Phil 4:4, 5b] In Latin: “Gaudete in Domino semper iterum dico gaudete. Dominus prope.” [In most churches, the Introit (Entrance Antiphon) is replaced by a hymn on Sundays, so we usually do not hear these words that give this Sunday its name – in Latin or English.]

However, we do hear the theme of joy, rejoicing, and exultation in the readings. In fact, the words of the Entrance Antiphon, along with the rest of the citation, are repeated a little later in the liturgy, during the second reading.

Although the main tenor of Advent is Expectation and Preparation, we are waiting for a joyous event, so the Church allows us this Sunday to begin to feel our Exultation at the coming of the Lord – at Christmas and at the end of the world. Much like the Exultation we feel as we approach the end of a long journey, such as when we see the road signs, “Orlando next 4 exits,” we begin to feel joy as we see the signs of Christmas in the history of salvation and in our liturgy.

We hear in our readings that the Messiah, Jesus, is not only coming but near, as we heard in the Entrance Antiphon. In our first reading, the prophet Zephaniah, shares Exultation (and joy) with the people over the news of the nearness of God: “Shout for joy...Sing joyfully...Be glad and exult with all

your heart...The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness...” [Zeph 3:14, 17]

We continue the theme in our second reading, as St. Paul calls the Philippians to Exultation and rejoicing for the same reason – the nearness of the Lord: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! [...] The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving...” [Phil 4:4, 5b-6]

Finally, we notice that, during the time of John the Baptist, the people were feeling the Exultation of the nearness of the Messiah and even mistook John for the Christ (Messiah). He clarified the true object of their Expectation and the reason for their Exultation: “Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, ‘I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming.’” [Lk 3:15-16a]

When Jesus came on that first Nativity the world changed forever, when Jesus will come again at the end of the world in glory the world will change again. So we can also expect that when Jesus comes into our lives and into our hearts, our world changes forever. There’s only one way to respond to this change: “Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again: **REJOICE!**”