



Homily for the Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2025

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Gaudete Sunday

Rejoice! The Lord is near! This is Gaudete Sunday and the Church's clear message to us is one of joy at the closeness of our God. Today, the Church gives us a visible sign of what this Sunday is about. The rose candle has been lit. In the midst of Advent's more subdued tones, this candle stands out. It signals a shift, not away from preparation, but deeper into it. The rose candle reminds us that Christian preparation for the return of Jesus is never grim or joyless. It focuses our attention on the joy that comes from knowing that the Lord has drawn near, that Christ has come among us, and that his coming changes everything.

Gaudete Sunday takes its name from the Church's command: "Rejoice" found in the Introit for today's Mass. This is not simply a pious suggestion rooted in sentimentality. It is an imperative, a command that governs the way Christians approach even the brokenness of this present world. We who have Jesus as our Savior have hope, and hope brings joy. Christian joy does not deny the brokenness of the world; it proclaims that God has entered into it and begun its restoration.

The first reading from Isaiah speaks with clarity and confidence. When God comes, creation responds. The desert blooms. Strength is given to the weak. Fear gives way to courage. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap. This is the work of the Lord when he comes to save his people. When these things are seen one cannot help but be joyful. Isaiah is not offering an abstract vision of the future; he is proclaiming what God does when He draws near.

The Gospel places this promise alongside a very human experience. John the Baptist, the great forerunner of Christ, now sits in prison. The same man who once pointed unhesitatingly to Jesus as the long promised "Lamb of God" who will take away the sins of the world, now asks, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Even the greatest among those born of women experiences in waiting darkness and uncertainty. Jesus does not rebuke John and his disciples. Instead, he points to the evidence of God's saving work already unfolding. The signs Isaiah foretold are happening. The kingdom is present, even if it is not yet complete.

This is where Advent meets our own experience. As a society, our attention is already fixed on Christmas. We are busy with last-minute shopping, planning gatherings, and filling calendars. These things are part of celebration, but the Church insists that they cannot be the whole of it. Advent demands interior preparation. Without prayer, repentance, and most importantly worship, joy becomes shallow and easily exhausted. Saint James reminds us that this joy requires patience. "Make your hearts firm," he says, "because the coming of the Lord is at hand." Advent joy grows slowly, like the farmer waiting for the rains. It is not frantic or forced. It is steady, rooted in trust that the Lord is near, even when circumstances suggest otherwise.

This is precisely why the Church must continue her work of influencing the culture at large. It is a slow and steady work that requires of us great patience and perseverance. Jesus describes the Church as salt, light, and leaven in the world. Salt preserves and gives flavor. Light reveals truth. Leaven quietly transforms the whole into something greater. The Church does not stand outside culture in opposition to it, nor does she uncritically absorb it. She enters into it in order to elevate it, reorienting human desire toward its true end. The Church is to be the compass that guides the world and all its inhabitants to our true home. To do this we have to be oriented rightly towards Christ who is to come again in Glory just like the rising sun after the darkness of light.



Saint Augustine gives us the key to understanding this when he writes, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (Confessions, I, 1). Much of the noise and anxiety of this season comes from hearts that are restless, searching for joy in things that cannot ultimately satisfy. The Church’s mission is not to shame that longing, but to point it toward its fulfillment in God.

This is why the familiar phrase, “Keep Christ in Christmas,” while true, is not sufficient. I would add, let us keep Mass in Christmas as well. Christ is not merely to be remembered at Christmas; He is to be adored. Like the wise men, we do not come simply to observe, but to fall on our knees and worship. The highest way we honor the reason-for-the-season is by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the acceptable sacrifice through which we are reconciled to God and drawn into communion with Him. To that end, I highly encourage you, if you have not already done so, to plan today which of the four Masses we are offering at Christmas you and your family plan to attend.

The Church teaches clearly that the work of reorientation of society belongs to all the faithful. The Second Vatican Council states that the laity are called “to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (Lumen Gentium, 31). Culture is shaped not only by institutions, but by families, workplaces, and daily choices. When Christian joy is lived visibly and faithfully, it evangelizes. The witness of you and your family going to Church at Christmas makes a concrete statement about what we are truly about - rejoicing in the saving presence of our God and changing the rhythm of our own lives to give Him the worship that is due.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed this truth succinctly when he wrote, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Deus Caritas Est, 1). That encounter is what Advent prepares us for. It is what Christmas celebrates. And it is what the Eucharist renews every time we gather for worship.

The rose candle, then, is not a pause from preparation, but a reminder of its purpose. We prepare not out of anxiety, but out of joy. We fast, we pray, and we reorder our lives because the Lord is coming, and because he is already among us. Christian joy is never disconnected from the cross, but neither is it overshadowed by it. It is the quiet confidence that God is faithful to his promises.

As we move into the final days of Advent, the Church invites us to refocus and reorient our vision. Not away from celebration, but toward its source. Not away from the world, but toward its redemption. Joy becomes credible when it is anchored in worship, and hope becomes visible when it shapes how we live.

In a culture that often measures success by consumption and activity, the Church offers a different witness. We testify that true joy is found not in what we acquire, but in whom we adore. We testify that time spent in prayer is never wasted. And we testify that kneeling before the Lord in the Mass forms us into a people capable of transforming the world from within.

Saint Leo the Great once preached to the faithful, “And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: Glory to God in the highest, and they proclaim peace to men of good will as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God’s goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly hearts of men?” (Sermon 1 on the Nativity of the Lord). The joy of this season calls us not only to celebration, but to conversion of heart. It reminds us who we are and whose we are.



So on this Gaudete Sunday, marked by the lighting of the rose candle, the Church commands us to rejoice. We rejoice because Christ has come. We rejoice because He comes to us even now in Word and Sacrament. And we rejoice because we have been entrusted with the mission of bearing his light into the world.

As we continue our Advent journey, may our joy be deep, our hope steady, and our worship sincere. In doing so, we help influence and orient a culture to be one that does not merely celebrate Christmas, but is transformed by Christ.