

**Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – 3rd Sunday Advent (C) -- Lk 3:10-18**

**The Preaching of John The Baptist**

***“Rejoice in the Lord Always.”***

For readings ... see [here](#).

This Sunday is what the Church calls, Gaudete or Rejoice Sunday and we recall how St Paul wrote: **“Rejoice in the Lord Always, I say it again REJOICE!”** Phil 4:4 And, so today we light the rose colored candle in the advent wreath and wear rose colored garments (not red or pink) to signify JOY.

My wife, Nancy and I have been following Fr Mike Schmitz’s Advent journey called Face-to-Face ... from Ascension Presents. He has a short video each day with readings and reflections. One story that I thought applied to today (a day of great rejoicing) was what happens when younger children visit Santa Clause. Most children are so excited they can’t wait to see Santa ... but sometimes ... a child suddenly becomes extremely agitated and scared and screams and doesn’t want to have anything to do with Santa. You’ve probably seen or heard of these.

Fr Mike then turns from meeting with Santa Clause to all of us ... meeting Jesus Face-to-Face ... yes ... it will happen to all of us. St Paul writes, *“eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what God has ready, for those who love Him”* ... But how are we deep inside ... spiritually ... are we prepared ... or will we want to scream and run away in shame ... due to guilt from sin? Or are we confident that we will hear Jesus say ... well done my good and faithful servant... come and enter the Kingdom and then experience from St Paul’s words ... a joy beyond understanding.

In today’s Gospel, we heard:

**The crowds asked John the Baptist, “What should we do?” He said to them in reply, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He answered them, “Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.” Soldiers also asked him, “And what is it that we should do?” He told them, “Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.”**

They then wonder if he is the Messiah but he says ... no ... one greater is coming ... Yes ... Jesus Christ came ... but St John’s message of repentance and doing good works is completely in line with what Jesus taught ... and so the Church has this beautiful Gospel on this Rejoice Sunday ... that true joy that comes from ... as we hear from the peace prayer of St Francis:

*Make me a channel of your peace,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
In giving of ourselves that we receive.  
And in dying that we’re born to eternal life.*

Yes, ultimate, true joy comes when we follow Jesus’s way ... and give of ourselves.

Pope Francis' first encyclical is called *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel. Today, I offer one paragraph from the encyclical and I quote:

*Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our “technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy”. I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in **poor people** who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing*

*professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of [Benedict XVI](#) which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: “Being a 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”.End quote.*

We must break free from the many desires and attachments of this world and instead come to know Jesus who is THE WAY. And, God has revealed to us the way through scripture and his Church... through wonderful documents like the Catechism and encyclicals like the one just mentioned. In addition, Jesus gave us the sacraments, especially confession. In the coming days, you have ample opportunity, to go to confession and be reconciled with God ... to receive His great mercy.

If we want to play the game correctly, to follow THE WAY ... to know Jesus, we need to know the rules. If we want to drive, we learn the rules of the road. If we play hockey, pinochle, football, or whatever game ... we must learn and know the rules ... and practice a lot. When we go to school or work, we have very specific rules that if not followed get us thrown out, held back, or even fired. If we don't follow the biological rules and take care of our bodies, we can get very sick or even die. Right?

This game of life that we all find ourselves in is the most wonderful and important game we will ever play. Playing “life” correctly will give us an inner, true joy now and an indescribable joy when the game is finished, when we finally cross the finish line and come Face-to-face with Jesus.

In St John's Gospel, he writes that St John the Baptist proclaimed: **‘I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘make straight the way of the Lord.’** We make the way straight by following rules ... and seek His mercy through confession when we stumble.

When asked which rule (or commandment) is the greatest, here is what Jesus said ...  
from St. Matthew's Gospel:

***"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.***

***The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. "***

Finally, as we continue to prepare for Christmas and seek **true joy**, let us recall that Jesus also said:

***If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and YOUR JOY may be complete."***

***AMEN***