

Homily

3rd Sunday of Advent 12/16/18

Fr. Danny

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice! These words from St Paul to the Philippians are why we are gathered today. On this Gaudete Sunday, which means Rejoice! The reason we wear a different color vestment is because it signifies a very specific moment in our preparation time. Now, for those who are wondering, and I know I make this joke every year, well, I'm like a dad joke person: It is not pink! Jesus did not **pink** from the dead, He **rose** from the dead. It is Rose!

My brothers and sisters, we come to this celebration of the third Sunday of Advent, getting closer and closer to that day of reckoning, to that day when we are called to rejoice, in a very real way at the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. Yes, in the second coming, but also at Christmas, we're called to realize what it means for us to rejoice.

Where does our joy in life come from? Well for some of us it comes from our families. For some of us it comes from passing a test. I know when I passed a test I was always like "Oh, thank you God!" (Every once in a while, it happened.) And then every once in a while, we rejoice because our sports teams win, right? When the Sooners win or the Thunder win or when the Cowboys win (not the ones in Dallas, the ones up in Stillwater, because no one rejoices when Dallas wins -yet they're America's team somehow)

But where is it that true joy lies? Those things give us momentary glimpses of joy, but is joy truly present in any of those? Well the closest I would say, would be in our families. Which makes sense. Because in our families we get the closest we can to experiencing the love of God. That true Joy to the World – that song that we sing at Christmas, we hear those words and they just go through our mind as just a nice Christmas song. But do you listen to the words in it? Joy to the World, the Lord has come! *The Lord has come*, that's why there's joy in the world!

Because if you look at salvation history, before Christ there was very little joy in the world. There was sin, there was temptation, even in the Old Testament, we saw that God would bless the Israelite people, then the Israelite people would be

so thankful... up until they sinned. And they always did. And then what would happen? God would then punish the people. And what would the people then do? They'd repent, wearing sack cloth and ashes, and say Lord we have failed, we have sinned against you. Have mercy on us. And God, because He is all merciful, would forgive them and bless them. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

But with Christ's birth, with the Incarnation, with God becoming man, at the celebration of Christmas, something changed. Something changed in the history of creation and John the Baptist tells us about it in today's Gospel. As we've heard over the last few weeks, "A voice cries out in the wilderness", hearkening back to the words of the prophet Isaiah, "A voice cries out in the wilderness, saying, prepare the way of the Lord." The entrance hymn we had today "Prepare the way of the lord. Prepare the way of the Lord,"

But what's interesting, is when we look at the John the Baptist, many people say, "Man, he was a really, really good guy. He taught these nice things. And he just taught exactly what people needed to understand exactly who Christ was." But if you look at some of his teachings, they were pretty harsh. He was telling them to repent. He was telling them that before they could receive the joy that comes with Christ, who was to follow him, whom he was to hearken, they had to *repent every sin in their lives*.

Does anyone here like to repent? Seeing the lines on Tuesday nights, I understand. But rarely do we like to have that introspection in our lives. Many times, we try to distract ourselves from those things that we've done. For me, I didn't realize it until my third or fourth year in seminary, the reason I played so many video games, was because I was running away from my sins. Cause if I don't have to look at them face to face, they really didn't happen, right? Or at least that's how we like to think about it. It's not true, but well, only God saw those, they really didn't happen, or only this one other person knew of my sins so they really didn't happen.

As long as we don't talk about it, we can sweep it under the rug and go on like everything is perfect. But inside, we're dying. Inside those sins are eating us alive. It's like corrosion in our engines. I use that analogy purposely, because sin is like corrosion in your soul's engine.

If you don't get your oil changed every few months, what happens? The car will die. Believe me, if you don't get your oil changed in your car, it's gonna die. (I hate cars!) But if we don't get the oil of our hearts changed often either, we are dead inside. It's hard for us to respond to the grace and mercy of God if we are corroded inside.

But that's what sin does. But just like when you get the oil change, you feel kind of fresh for a few days. And right when you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and we receive that absolution, we're very fresh for a few days. You feel like you can take on the world. "I've got this!... Oh, I don't got this no more. Sin's got me."

That's what John the Baptist was trying to tell us. We must repent so as to be able to prepare room within our hearts to receive the joy of the Gospel. And what is the joy of the Gospel? Jesus. For us to receive the joy of the world, we must be free from sin. That's what John the Baptist was trying to lead us towards, was trying to lead his people towards when he was saying, "I'm not even worthy to untie the sandal straps of the One Who is to come. I baptize with water, but He will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. He will separate the wheat from the chaff or the sheep from the goats."

But like many of you, I too have been that lost sheep. The one that didn't get it at times. I, even as a priest sometimes say, do I *really* need to go to Confession? Ok, I guess I should.

I remember the first time one of my siblings asked me this question, and I was affronted by it. I was in a really grumpy and crotchety mood when I was in seminary. I called one of my sisters who was in and out of church, and she said, "Danny, when was the last time you went to Confession?" "Excuse me?!!" "You're kinda grumpy. You might want to go to Confession." And so, being a typical person, I said "Who are you to call me out? Who are **you**, my sister who I always fight with, to tell me what to do?" And up went the defense mechanism that we all have when confronted with the truth, when we aren't used to seeing the truth. I got really upset and angry.

And what did I do? I went to Confession! And I realized the truth that was in her words. I *did* need to go to confession. Because I was not allowing God's grace

and God's joy to be present in my life. Instead I was allowing the sins that I had allowed to muck up the engine of my heart to rule over my life. I allowed those to rule and judge my decisions. So I was making some bad decisions. And I was making some bad choices because I did not listen to the urging of God.

In seminary, when we had our class on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we always talked about having a fully contrite heart. And it's really hard to have. Because if we have a fully contrite heart and we're going to confession, it means that we are going to Confession to ask forgiveness for our sins, not because we don't want to go to Hell, but because *we recognize the fault in our sins*. And that our decisions have turned us from God.

For many of us though, for most of us, and for me myself at times, I go to confession less seeking God's mercy and more of "I don't want to tiptoe into hell today if I were to die today." So we ask the question then, if we're called to have perfect contrition in our hearts when we go the sacrament of Reconciliation, and we aren't there yet, is the sacrament even valid? Yes, it is. It is valid. Because the fact that you showed up on the priest's doorstep or in the priest's office shows that at some point you are still cognizant and recognizing the voice of God.

Because just like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son is always waiting for his son to come home, and rushes after him when he does, God is always calling us back to His heart. Any time that we go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is not because **we** want to be there. Any time that you go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is because *God has been calling you* and calling you and you finally said "I give up! Fine, let's do this!"

That's how much our Father loves us. That's how much love our God has for us. That he will constantly and continually knock on the doors of our hearts until we finally answer. We can only ignore that buzzer for only so long. It's like that morning alarm when we hit snooze... and snooze...and snooze... and snooze and snooze again. (Does anybody else set more than three alarms in the morning. And then hit snooze on each of them 5 times? Every morning.) But that many times is the same way we respond to God's love. The same way we respond to God's mercy, we keep hitting the snooze button, saying, "Oh, I'll take care of that

tomorrow.” Procrastination 101: Why do today what I can do tomorrow? Cause there’s *always* going to be a tomorrow. Until there isn’t.

For procrastinators, that’s the unjoy of the Gospel. There isn’t always going to be a tomorrow in this life. Each and every one of us at some time will come to the end of this life. For many of us that’s a sorrowful moment. It’s not meant to be. It’s not meant to be a sorrowful moment to die and leave this life. I’ve talked about that a little this year purposely because yes, it is sorrowful because we have transitioned from one life to the next, but if our ultimate goal is to get to Heaven, the only way to get there is to depart from this life.

Depart this life well. In contrition of heart. If the joy of the Gospel is that our lord loves us so much that He gave His life to save us. And that he rose from the dead, and He paid the price for your and my sins. So that we too could have the opportunity to follow after him. If that doesn’t bring joy to our hearts, nothing else will. (Except maybe if OU actually beat Alabama.) There are things that can actually happen, and then there are dreams. We put more stock in dreams many times in life than in reality.

The reality in life is that God is good. The reality is that God loves you. The reality is, God wants you to experience joy in your lives and not to be sick at heart. Not to be depressed.

And this season for many people is a sad season. If you’ve lost someone this year, celebrating Christmas is kind of dreary. I have a lot of families at both parishes and even at McGuinness, that this is going to be a very dreary Christmas. Because they’re celebrating these great festivals for the first time without that person that’s been by them for years and years and years. That’s sad. It hurts.

How do we though comfort them I few have no peace in our hearts? How do we comfort those loved ones? If we can’t experience the joy, we can’t share the joy. We see on TV and all over the place, “The way to keep Christ in Christmas is to keep Christ in the Mass.” To keep us coming to Church. That’s true. That is true, but there’s so much more than that.

Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, however you use that phrase, it all comes from where you’re coming from. Are we saying it as we pass by someone, like you

would say, “Good morning! How are you today?” When you really don’t care how they are. Cause that’s how many of us use those words. Happy holidays, Merry Christmas, and we just move on. We don’t truly mean the words we say. Do we truly want this person to have a merry Christmas? Or do we say it, but feel the opposite? That’s sometimes where we have to start.

At this conference this last weekend, I was told time and time again, We have to meet people where they’re at. But we can’t stay there. We have to accompany them along that journey. The road to Emmaus, one of the most famous stories about after Christ’s resurrection, He meets them and He walks with them. And He says, “Why are you so sad?” “You’re the only one that doesn’t know what’s happened this past week?” “No, please tell me!”

It is in sharing our faith that we come to experience the joy of God. Our Protestant brothers and sisters get that so well, we as Catholics, fail at sharing our faith. I can remember multiple times when I was ashamed to pray before meals when I was in public. I never said a faster blessing than when I was out by myself and I remember to pray before I eat! But sometimes our actions do show what’s residing within us. Now anytime I go out (and yes, I am a priest) I make sure that everyone at the table prays. Deliberately. We have to show with our actions what it means to be Christians.

And I have to say when I see a family praying together at a restaurant, you guys have seen it – you just know that’s a sign of faith. Unfortunately, most time when that happens, they’re not Catholic. Cause we don’t like to pray outside of our bedrooms or outside of the church. Definitely not in our cars. But God’s calling us to live every moment for Him.

And my role as pastor is to meet you where you are at, knowing that not everyone is ready to die today. I know that – I’m not ready to die! But if today is my last day, what things have I left unsaid, what things have I left undone, that my heart may be without sin, that my heart may be without anxiety? Because that’s how we’re called to live.

But in the twenty-first century, in the United States, in Oklahoma, does anybody not suffer from anxiety? That many times is what holds us back in life. Anxiety about making the wrong decision.

I never realized how much pressure is put on priests until I became one. Especially as a pastor. Every decision that's made is scrutinized. Positively or negatively. "Oh, that's so great that you did that!" "Why did you do move my statue?!" "Oh, that's great that you ..." "Why did you have someone sit in my place??"

For many of us we don't realize that the anxiety that wells up within us is really a desire to experience the joy that can only come from God. He calls us to have peace in our hearts. And it's hard to be peaceful in a world that is wracked by anxiety by grief, by depression, by hatred by fear.

That's the good news today. That despite all of those negative things in our world, God can and will come, if we allow Him to. So, may we truly accept the truth that comes from the gospels today from the Word of God, that same Word that spoke creation into being, offers us peace this very day. I don't know about you, but I don't like to live with anxiety. Accept God's peace. Allow Him to bring you to joy. And then when you gather around your table this Christmas season offer your brothers and sisters, your mom and dad, your sons and daughters the love that can only come from God.