

Third Sunday of Advent: Rejoice, Chicken Little is Wrong!

This Sunday is *Gaudete Sunday* or *Rejoice Sunday*. It takes its name from the readings for today, particularly the second reading from *Paul's Letter to the Phillipians*, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice." One way of looking at this Sunday is to focus on the joy that Christmas is only two weeks away. Another way of considering this Sunday is to focus in on the joy of the ancient Hebrews as they heard their prophets tell them that God is coming soon and will remove his judgment against them.

In light of the events of the last number of years, I would like to consider another facet of today's readings. And that facet has this warning: "Don't listen to Chicken Little." We have been so besieged with negativity. A few years ago we heard that the world was coming to an end due to the pandemic. Sometimes we hear that the world as we know it is coming to an end because the enemies of our country have an upper hand against us. During the election we heard that the world would be coming to an end as long as this party remains in power, or that party resumes power. Chicken Little has a full time job at CNN and FOX News. Sadly, many of us have listened to the feathered fowl of distress and believe that he is correct.

When Chicken Little's rantings are added to the normal difficulties of life, people coming down with cancer, heart problems, dying in car accidents, elderly relatives dying, financial difficulties, marital difficulties, problems with various addictions, etc etc, we can easily assume the persona of being a victim to circumstances.

Gaudete Sunday reminds us that this line of thinking is incorrect. We are not victims, flapping our wings trying to fly to no avail, because chickens don't fly. No, we are not Chicken Littles. We are not victims of whatever we think is happening around us. No, we are not victims, we are victors.

Our God loves us so much that He became One of us and One with us. He has showered us with Grace. We sing "Joy to the World," not just as a pleasant Christmas carol, but as a statement of our faith. We believe that God has brought joy to the world. We cannot allow anything, any circumstance to steal this joy from us. Instead of succumbing to the "Woe is Me" attitude, focusing on the negatives of our lives, we need to see the bigger picture, the infinitely bigger picture. We may not be full of Grace as Mary was, we are not immaculately conceived, but we have received a great deal of Grace. We have been made children of God. Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters. We have received so much Grace that God has transformed even the worst circumstances of our lives in avenues of growth. How often I have done funerals where people have given eulogies saying how their loved one grew closer to God throughout their sickness. A while back I anointed a man who was imminent. His wife told me that his last words were, "I love God." Those were only his last words here. Through the Grace of God, he will have much to say for all eternity.

In my office I have a beautiful portrait of an eight year old girl wearing her First

Communion outfit. Her mother was a medic in the navy in Iraq. She was caring for a marine on the battle field when she took a bullet in the head. The marines pulled her out of the battle zone, and the doctors were able to save her life, but she ended up paralyzed on one side. She was determined to get herself back to the best health as she could because she had a daughter to raise. She told me, "I am not a hero. I was just doing my job. I am not a victim either. I am who I am, a mother who has to raise my baby girl." And she had joy, the joy of the Lord. I got to know this young lady because she wanted to have Christ in her life and honored me by asking me to bring her and her child into the Church. (Side bar: As I have written many times, we priests have the best lives ever.) This mother lived for me what Gaudete Sunday is all about. This Sunday reminds us that no matter what is going on in the world, or in our lives, God is in control. Knowing that He is in control brings us joy.

The sky is falling. We are all going to die of Covid or the next pandemic. The sky is falling. The democrats are in control. The sky is falling, the republicans are going to take control. Nonsense. Nonsense. Nonsense. The only thing that matters is that which comes from God and that which returns to God.

Jesus Christ is the Victor. He is in control of our lives, if we let Him take control of our lives. And yes, this physical life will load us with challenge after challenge, but with Jesus Christ, we can meet each challenge with the joy of knowing that all we need in life is the Presence of the Lord.

And He is coming.

And He has come.

Gaudete. Be joyful!

(Take that, Chicken Little!)