

Gaudete – Rejoice Sunday

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The 3rd Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete” a Latin word which means Rejoice.” Advent is another Latin word which means coming or arrival anticipation. In our society we have several practices and preparation of anticipation, namely baby-shower, bridal-shower and lately gender reveal has been added to such practice of anticipation and preparation. These practices are about joyful expectation of what is to come, whether the birth of a baby or celebrating the sacrament of marriage. Therefore, Gaudete Sunday is about joyful expectation and waiting for Christmas, the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel. In Today’s first scripture reading, Prophet Zephaniah invites the people of Israel saying, “Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel.”

The prophet indicates that the past trial and tribulations are over, and the future is brighter. Not of Israel’s merit but of God’s goodness and faithfulness saying, “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty savior.” In my childhood, I remember whenever I had a nightmare, my father would hold me saying, “I am here with you, don’t be afraid.” Now I am a parent, I have assured my children many times telling my children, “I am here, do not be afraid.” Such assurance of presence and caring love calms down a child to go back to sleep or not to be afraid. The assurance of God’s presence in our midst is not only alleviate our fear but an invitation to rejoice and make festival like merry. Prophet Isaiah affirms, “Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Israel, located at the crossroads of ancient mighty empires suffered conquests, domination and even enslavements. Like the African proverb, “The fighting of elephants makes the grass suffer.” Hebrew prophets pointed out such sufferings were the consequence of Israel’s lack of keeping the covenant. Yet, God remains faithful to his covenant, constantly inviting his people back to him. Preparing for Christmas, on this “Gaudete Sunday” the 2nd reading announces, “The Lord is near.” The question is, “How close are we to the Lord?” Is God’s immanence a cause for internal disturbance or an opportunity for celebration? This is an invitation for self-assessment and introspection.

The Gospel invites us to have the right disposition to realize God’s presence in our midst. In John the Baptist’s words, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.” John also explains to us what is the wrong disposition that can blur God’s presence among us to avoid: greed, extortion, false accusation, bullying, etc. John’s message was received as good news, “Now the people were filled with expectations, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.” John did not want to

glow in the moment and derail his mission, instead he said, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming.” In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist said, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize...” (Jn 1:26).

“One among you, whom you do not recognize” is the story of our society today because of our political views, ethnic identities, race classifications, we do not recognize Christ in each other. Largely, we are “troubled” by each other’s presence, considering an invasion of our spaces and rights. We forget we are not only signs of God’s presence, but we are also temples of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling of the Divine. We such disposition, God in our midst should affect our relationship with each other, our unity in God should be a cause for joy and exaltation.