

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent which is officially known in the Church as “Gaudete Sunday.” And “gaudete” is a Latin command which literally means, “rejoice!” So why are we supposed to “rejoice” this Sunday? Is it because *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* has been released?! No, as much as I love Star Wars, that’s not the reason. No, the Church calls us to rejoice today because we’re getting closer to the great Solemnity of Christmas—when we celebrate our Savior’s birth for us!

The Church calls us to rejoice this Sunday because our Savior is near—because we’re about to celebrate the most monumental event in human history in which God Himself completes His entrance into space and time in order to save us from our sins and from death itself. We’re also called to rejoice at the prospect of our Savior’s glorious return to us and for His love, justice, and peace to finally reign in all of creation.

So Holy Mother Church joyfully proclaims to us in the midst of our busy and hectic lives, in the midst of all the stress, anxiety, and craziness that accompanies this time of year, to prayerfully take a step back from it all and “rejoice,” for our salvation is at hand!

In the First Reading today from Isaiah, we hear exactly who our Savior is and what He has come to do for us. Our Savior is the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ—“Christos” in ancient Greek, which is translated as the “Anointed One,” meaning that He possesses the fullness of divinity, the fullness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Isaiah goes on to describe the Savior’s mission: to bring glad tidings to the poor, *to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners*. In short, our Savior has come to liberate us from the oppressive slavery of sin and death—to free us from *our own* sins and from the destructive power of evil. Such divine liberation calls forth great joy on our part as sinners who are in desperate need of God’s transformative mercy and grace. The proximity of our salvation and the prospects of our Savior’s glorious return should cause us to wholeheartedly echo the words of today’s Responsorial Psalm: “My soul rejoices in my God!”

In today’s Gospel, we hear St. John the Baptist’s captivating proclamation, which echo the famous words of the prophet Isaiah—words that form the spiritual foundation of the Advent season: “Make

straight the way of the Lord!” In other words, “Our Savior is coming! Prepare the way of the Lord!”

Brothers and sisters, in this season of Advent, in order to “prepare the way” of the Lord, we need to *“get out of the way”* and allow our Savior to *be Who He is and actually save us! We need to let Jesus be Jesus*—we need to let Him be the Savior so that He can truly save us in every possible way. We need to let Him satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts, to forgive our sins. We need to let Him heal our wounds, liberate us from any destructive fears, worries, and anxiety—let Him lead us and guide us in the midst of any challenges and suffering.

We need to let Christ our Savior accomplish in our lives *what He came to do*—and that is to save us from the power of sin and death. In fact, in the second reading today from Thessalonians, St. Paul says it best when he writes, “Do not quench the Spirit!” In other words, *let God be God* in your life and allow the Holy Spirit to do *His* work of sanctification. Remember, *it is God Who saves us and makes us holy*—we can’t save ourselves and make ourselves holy through our own power. However, God doesn’t force holiness or salvation upon us as

individuals. He respects our freedom and so God will *only* sanctify us and save us if we freely give Him permission to do so. Therefore, cooperating with the grace of Christ in authentic freedom means humbly “getting out of the way” and allowing our Savior to truly save us—to change us, to purify and sanctify our lives!

Brothers and sisters, we’re not perfect, and we don’t have to be *absolutely perfect* and have “everything together” for us to welcome Christ into our hearts—that’s the whole point of inviting Christ into our hearts—so He can transform us and save us! All we need to have to welcome Christ our Savior into our lives is an *open and receptive heart!*

So what, if anything, is holding us back from “getting out of the way” and allowing Christ to truly enter our hearts and save us? Is it fear, arrogant pride, selfishness, greed, anger, lust, a stubborn refusal to acknowledge my own sinfulness? Are we afraid that if we let Christ into our hearts He’s going to ask us to change our lives in ways we don’t want? In our current age of moral relativism where any mention of an objective reality of evil and sin is seen as being “too harsh and judgmental,” there’s a temptation to think that “I’m such a good person

and I don't really need a Savior. I haven't done anything wrong and I *never* have to go to confession and receive Christ's mercy and forgiveness!" Now please don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that as Catholics we need to have poor self-esteem—no, I'm not saying that. Rather I'm saying we need humility, healthy self-awareness, and the realistic honesty to acknowledge that as sinners, we need a Savior—we need our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I'm sorry, but none of us are "too good" for our Savior. *None of us are perfect* and *all of us are sinners* in need of our merciful and loving Savior. Think about it, if we were so good and the human race was just doing fine and dandy, then Christ would never have come as our Savior—but He *did come* to save us, because we need saving and we should rejoice at that truly "Good News"!

So as we prepare to worship and thank Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's open our hearts to Him and prepare the way of the Lord by humbly "getting out of the way" and allowing Him to truly be our Savior—to truly save us from our own sins and all that may endanger our soul.