

## **Third Sunday of Advent “A” Cycle December 11, 2016**

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed the Lord is near.” This exhortation is from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians and is the Entrance Antiphon for today’s Mass. This Sunday is called the “joyful” Sunday of Advent, because the joyful feast of Christmas is fast approaching, only two weeks away. This is why the presider wears rose-colored vestments, why we have roses placed before the altar, and why we light for the first time the rose colored candle of the Advent wreath.**

**The first reading, from the prophet Isaiah, gives a message of hope and encouragement and hence joy to the Jewish exiles who have returned to their homeland. Despite the devastation and the huge task of rebuilding, the prophet’s message from the Lord is: “those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.”**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, from the letter of James, contains a somewhat different message. The apostle addresses the disciples of Jesus, who were expecting his immediate return, to be patient. He urges them not to complain and find fault with one another. The virtue of patience is needed to experience true and lasting joy.**

**In the Gospel, we hear again about John the Baptist. He has been imprisoned because of his outspoken criticism of the leaders of the people, especially King Herod for his immoral life-style. John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the “one who is to come, (i.e. the Messiah) or should we look for another?”**

**Jesus responds by pointing out the works of his ministry: “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” All of this is certainly cause for great joy. Jesus goes on to praise John as a great man and prophet, as the divinely appointed messenger, sent to prepare the way for him.**

**We all look forward to the pleasures and joys of Christmas with all its wonderful traditions and customs. Psychologists, however, tell us that many people do not experience this. Perhaps it is because they do not look beyond the traditions and customs to reflect on the reason for the season.**

**In these last two weeks before Christmas, let us reflect on the good news of our faith, which brings us joy. Pope Francis wrote an apostolic exhortation, whose English title is the *Joy of the Gospel*. Its opening sentence states: “the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.”**

**With Pope Francis, and Christians world-wide, let us take time to pray, to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, to pray for patience, and to see the good in each other. May we experience over and over, deeper and deeper, the overwhelming joy of the good news that Jesus Christ offers to us.**