

Joy, the advertisement for a new phone said. Joy, a noun. Catch it now! Although I'm very sure that the ad popped up on my computer because of my internet searches for sermon resources, I'm also very sure that the rejoicing we proclaim on this third Sunday of Advent has nothing to do with having the latest model phone.

The traditional name for this Sunday is Rejoice Sunday (Gaudete in Latin). It is the day we light the pink or rose candle. The day when our readings lead us to respond to God's presence and action in our lives.

Rejoice, Zephaniah and Isaiah, each of them living in a time of oppression, corruption, and economic injustice, tell us. Rejoice, for God is with us. Rejoice, Paul writes to a community he loves from his prison cell. God who loves us and calls us into relationship, who nourishes and brings us peace, is among us.

The three readings call for rejoicing in community in gratitude, in supplication, and thanksgiving, not only for what God is doing, also in expectation for what God will do. The past, present, and future come together as we wait expectantly for the entrance of the Messiah into our hearts and lives.

Our Gospel tells us that John the Baptist is proclaiming Good News. His opening lines sure don't seem like he's about to share good news. His followers, a diverse crowd of people from a variety of backgrounds, have come into the wilderness to hear him preach. They have been drawn to him by some hole in their lives, some sense of longing, a search for something new, a promise of a different kind of life, a deepening relationship with God. The Jews in the crowd have been waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, a Messiah that they hope will save them from their oppressors. The soldiers,

tax collectors, and Gentiles come. They listen to John and, even at his harsh words, don't turn away.

Nor do they turn away when he tells them to bear fruit worthy of their faith.

Instead, they ask, what can we do?

John's message of repentance—that our heritage, our baptism, our faith—all must be manifest in our actions. Repentance is not simply saying we are sorry—even during the confession we say each Sunday—and turning back to life as we have previously lived it. Repentance is making a mental and spiritual U-Turn (FOTW). Turning back to God and responding to God's presence in our lives.

The Right Reverend Jacob Owensby, Bishop of Western Louisiana explains repentance this way:

God has initiated a relationship with us prior to even the feeblest moral reflection on our part. Repentance is our response to God's intimate presence in our lives. (p. 7)

Repentance is the admission that we need to learn how to live; a change of heart, however, happens gradually. We have to grow into it. God's transforming love seeps into our lives sometimes gently, sometimes startlingly, but never all at once. (p 8)

What can we do?

John gives the crowd some steps to take—sharing with those who have less and living out their roles and authority with integrity, equity, and justice. His recommendations are simple and yet, they are steps that help to transform the community. By turning to another person, by sharing with them, we are also turning to recognize God in that

person. By carrying out our roles at work and in the community with justice and integrity, knowing that even the most mundane things we do provide others the chance to see the presence of God through us.

As we hear global, national, and community stories of hunger, displacement, violence, and oppression, we may also ask the question, what can we do? As we see people in our community, in our parish, and in our families, we may ask, what can we do? As we reflect, individually and as a community, how to make the change of heart that allows God's transforming love into our own lives, let us begin by the simple steps of turning to provide for others in our community. Sharing, caring for them, showing God's love and our faith manifest through our actions. For through our actions, others will experience our joy and hope a

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