

Homily 3rd Week of Advent Cycle A
Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10 * Psalm 146:6-10 * James 5:7-10 * Matthew 11:2-11

(Sing) *Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel...shall come to thee O Israel.* Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means rejoice. As Christians, we are called to be joyful, to recognize the coming of the Lord in our lives.

As we enter into the gospel reading today, John the Baptist, who is in prison for calling out the sins of King Herod, has asked his disciples to go ask Jesus a question – are you the one to come or should we look for another? And Jesus does not answer him by saying of course I am, I was born of the Virgin Mary, I am from the House of David, you John announced me as the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world, you called me the Messiah. Instead, he answers him by saying "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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. He is echoing the words of the Prophet Isaiah from the first reading today. From this, John would clearly know to be strong and fear not for here is your God! And so would those who John sent to Jesus. John was leading his disciples to become disciples of Jesus.

I started thinking, what would people who have spent time with me report back that they have heard and seen? Have I been a good disciple of Christ? Being a good disciple is much more than calling yourself Christian. Jesus is telling us in the gospel today that being a disciple requires action. The first action of being a disciple is putting God first in everything. A disciple follows fully and completely the teachings of Christ and His Church. A disciple fully engages in the sacraments, especially the eucharist and reconciliation. A disciple surrenders their will to the will of God. A disciple loves others as Jesus loves them. A disciple rejoices even in suffering and times of difficulty because he or she knows the Lord is present in their life and they should not fear but be strong. A disciple lives out a life that brings others to Jesus. I don't know about you, but I have some work to do!

Let me share some stories of disciples I know. The first is a lady name Cora who has left us to be with God. For many years, I would bring Cora the Eucharist at an assisted living facility in Yorktown. Cora was bed-ridden for the most part and often in pain. Each time I came to see her, she was so happy to see me. She never complained about anything and was so joyful to receive Jesus. In fact, she spent all of her time with me talking about her family and asking for prayers for them. She was an incredible inspiration to me because she was joyful in the midst of her suffering. We can often mistake happiness and joy. Happiness is fleeting depending on the circumstances of life, but joy is a permanent disposition that is found in the disciple of Christ. As we heard in the second reading today from James, Cora was patient in her hardships and she did not complain. She had a joy about her that could not be taken away because she was completely in love with Jesus. She made me a stronger disciple by the witness of her faith in God, her strength and perseverance, her desire to receive to receive the sacraments, and her self-less love for others.

Then there is one of our parishioners who we all know as Dave. He said I could talk about him today. Dave has had cerebral palsy all his life. Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture. I see Dave going up and down the road in his motorized wheelchair and I see him at church every week. Every time I see Dave he is smiling and most of the time talking with someone. Dave is a disciple because I can see the love he has for the Lord and he does not allow cerebral palsy to define who he is. I have only known Dave for less than a year, but from where I stand, he is a disciple because he simply draws me closer to God and he does the same to those around him. In his own way, he is a magnet for the Lord. I can only imagine the different challenges he faces each day, but I know one thing, he is joyful and it cannot be taken away because it comes from Christ.

Cora and Dave give me perspective and inspiration for my own life. Sometimes I let the ways of the world steal my joy. Sometimes when things don't go as I would like, I start to lose my joy. It is so easy for me to get down

about different things that happen in my life because I fail to recognize that God can take even the most parched land or desert and make them bloom abundantly with flowers. Cora was in the desert of not being able to move yet she was a most beautiful flower to all who visited her. Dave lives in the parched land of cerebral palsy but his soul and his joy are abundant because he fully knows and trusts in God. We are called to live a out our lives in the fullness of discipleship. When we do, joy becomes the fruit of God's salvation and love which resides in us. Joy leads us forth and gives us courage. The Lord comes, he comes into our life as a liberator; he comes to free us from all forms of interior and exterior trouble and difficulty. It is he who shows us the path of faithfulness, of patience and of perseverance, and of joy. And we can only imagine upon his return, our joy will be overflowing.

(Sing) Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel ...shall come to thee O Israel.