

Homily: 3rd Sunday of Advent: Cycle A: 2016: Is 35: 1-6, 10; Ps. 146; James 5:7-10: Mt 11:2-11

“Being a Person of Hope and Patience”

1. As we come to this 3rd Sunday of Advent, we celebrate *Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday*. Hence the option of the priest and deacon wearing the color rose which symbolizes hope and rejoicing in the Church. This is a time of rejoicing because we are anticipating the coming of Christ to save us from our sins. We should be filled with the supernatural virtue of Hope, which as the Catechism says is the theological virtue that brings into our hearts and minds a spirit of anticipation of the Divine blessing upon our lives, the fruit of which is rejoicing in the Lord. Are we a people of hope or do we allow ourselves to be consumed by cynicism, by negativity, by gloom and doom and complaining? Yes there are problems - sometimes big - in the world, in our families, at work, in our personal lives - but God can bring us through all of those challenges and obstacles if we let Him work, if we turn to Him in a spirit of **prayer and trust**. We must always give thanks to the Lord both in joy and in suffering, in success and failure, because all these things are ordained or permitted by Him for our sake and our salvation.
2. **We also need an abundance of the virtue of patience to grow in the likeness of Christ**, and in the virtue of hope and rejoicing in Him, always, in both good times and in bad. *Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.* Most people I encounter as a priest in the context of counseling, or spiritual direction, or confession will tell me at some point they are lacking in the grace of patience. So obviously this is a good virtue to ask the Lord to help us grow in. As St. James says in the 2nd reading today, *“like the farmer waiting for the fruit of the earth, you too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.”* As the saints tell us the foundation for growing in holiness, along with the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and love, is humility and patience. Also St. James gives some good advice tied into the virtue of patience, and that is, resisting the natural tendency to complain about one another. Did you ever take notice that when we complain about someone it never really makes us feel better? Or maybe for a little bit, but

not long term. The spiritual solution is when we are tempted to complain about others to catch ourselves and say a prayer for the person we are tempted to complain about. Obviously practice makes perfect in that regard, but try to do that on a daily basis and you will see a big improvement over time and will have more inner peace; and we will hopefully look more for the good in others rather than their defects of character which will all have in different ways. Finally St. James reminds us as a way of putting things in spiritual perspective, *“Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”* St. John the Baptist is a great example in that regard.

- 3. Finally as we celebrate this “Rejoice Sunday” do we realize that we are now living in the “new era of grace”?** That is the message of the Gospel today. Because Jesus has come among us, has shown us the way back to the Father, and won for us the grace of salvation, of redemption, by dying on the Cross and rising from the dead for the sake of the human race. As Jesus says to the crowds concerning St. John the Baptist, *“he is the greatest man born of woman up to that point on a natural level, but the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.”* The meaning of this is: we are now living in a new era of grace and if we are baptized in Christ we have God’s life in our souls and that is greater than any natural gift. St. John the Baptist closed out the old era of waiting upon the Messiah - he was the final prophet of the Old Testament even though we hear about him in the Gospels. Now that the Messiah has come to earth we can enter into the fullness of life in Christ with a personal relationship with Him through the Sacraments of the Church, and daily union with Him through prayer, the mystery of our own cross untied to Him: in patience, humility, self-abandonment and love and by living in a spirit of gratitude and rejoicing for our many blessings. May the next two weeks leading up to Christmas be a time of reconciliation, peace, and joy with God and neighbor, so we can present the Christ child with our greatest gift: *our hearts and lives focused on Him in a deeper way, with the firm resolution to live always in union with our Savior Jesus, so He can lead us into deeper union with Our Heavenly Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.* God bless you.