Homily for 3rd Sunday Advent 2014
December 14, 2014

Readings: Is. 61.1-11, Resp. Lk. 1.1-12; 1 Th. 5.16-24, Jn. 1.6-28

Place: Alumni Chapel

Theme: We rejoice at the anticipated coming of Our Lord.

The worldwide Catholic Church celebrates today as Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word Gaudete is a command which means, “rejoice”!

Notice that the celebrant is wearing rose-colored vestments; rose symbolizes joy. He is wearing rose rather than the usual Advent color of purple which symbolizes penance. For the same reason, in the Advent wreath, we light the rose-colored candle this third Sunday of Advent. Today’s readings proclaim, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord. In my God is the joy of my soul.” The Responsorial Psalm continues the theme, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” St. Paul writes, “Brothers and sisters, rejoice always.” In the gospel, John the Baptist joyfully describes the coming of Christ, “Make straight the way of the Lord. ... There is one among you who is coming after me, whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” The whole world rejoices at this time because we celebrate the imminent anniversary of the coming of the Messiah, the Savior and Anointed One, Jesus Christ. God has kept his promise. Even though successive generations of believers have responded imperfectly because by nature we are sinners, God has sent his only Son to save us from our sins, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and to establish the Church as leaven for the kingdom. Through the Church we have received God’s Word and sacraments. Our lives have become graced. The material world and all the good that exists herein has become blessed. You and I, all Christians, serve as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ. For these reasons, and more, we rejoice.

What is joy? ... How does joy differ from happiness and pleasure? ... I distinguish these terms so that we might experience joy, which is a unique gift of the Holy Spirit. Many time people may think that happiness, pleasure and joy are interchangeable. Actually the terms and the experiences are distinct. Without distinguishing them, we might too easily seek activities that either will make us happy or bring us pleasure, but would occasion us to miss the experience joy. Therefore, I ask you,

What is happiness? ... Happiness, generally, results from achieving good goals by good means. Achieving an “A” by cheating on an exam might fool your professor and make you appear smart, but it won’t make you happy. Lying on your couch might make you well-rested, but achieving nothing won’t make you happy. Happiness results from achieving good goals by good means.

What is pleasure? Pleasure, generally, is the satisfaction of a passion for a sensible object. Years ago, I served as pastor of a small parish. Whenever major problems or tensions arose in the parish, one of the women would bake and deliver a chocolate-chocolate cake. That was always very pleasurable. It did not solve the problems, but it soothed my feelings!

What is joy? Joy is the emotional response to the experience of harmony. Interestingly, joy does not require that we do something, which happiness requires. Joy does not require that we sense something
through our touch, taste, smelling, hearing, seeing, ..... Joy is the emotional response to the experience of harmony. Joy requires only that “our being, our spiritual center, our heart of hearts” be in unity with someone else or some ideal, like truth, goodness, faith, hope or love.

What brings you joy? ... Think about it. Ponder it. By way of example, may I share what brings me joy? First, holding an infant, or at Mass, hearing an infant whimper which is different from an infant screaming. How can you look at an infant and not believe in God? How can you hold God’s gift of an infant, and not feel extraordinarily close to God? Second, being in meaningful conversation with family and friends brings me joy. To reach down deeply and find the words to express one’s mind, heart and soul; to find truth, to express truth, to hear the truth, to remove confusion brings joy. Third and finally, prayer and the reception of the Eucharist brings me joy. Another name for Eucharist is Holy Communion. This sacrament establishes communion between Our Lord Jesus and oneself. Relationships bring joy, whether it be relationship with an infant, or adult, or with God.

I repeat my initial question, “what brings you joy?” ... Moments of happiness and pleasure are wonderful, but joy is profound. Moments of happiness and pleasure require some action and some sensible experience, but joy requires simply being ... Joy results from the union of mind, heart and soul with someone or God or some ideal. Let’s not miss joy by pursuing a path that brings us only happiness and pleasure. Remember the words of Isaiah, “In God is the joy of my soul.”

To our graduates, I offer three proven means that will bring you joy. Stay close to God. Stay close to family and friends. Stay close to your alma mater (studiorum), which means, “the dear mother of your studies.” You have learned well your program of studies. Apply well what you have learned. Continue to grow in your discipline, and continue to grow in the knowledge and practice of your faith. All scholars humbly admit, “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know.” We thank God for your good intellect. We thank God and your parents for acting as co-creators with God. We congratulate you for all the good that you have done.

For all of us, let’s seek to be happy, be pleased, and be joyful. And we desire especially to be joy-filled on Gaudete Sunday, when the Church joyfully anticipates the coming of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.