

In Navy bootcamp, there was a week-long module on Basic Fire Fighting - in a nutshell, seven days of training on how to put out a fire. Fires are a big deal onboard a ship ... actually fires are a big deal just about anywhere ... but the number one cause of fires at sea was cooking fires. And since most low-ranking Sailors would spend some time cranking in the galley, it was essential that they leave basic training with a rudimentary knowledge of fire safety.

There are three things that are necessary to start a fire ... and the same three things are needed to sustain a fire. They are visualized in what's known as the "Fire Triangle." Any Boy Scout, Fire Fighter, or Safety Rep should know what those three ingredients are:

- (1) Heat
- (2) Fuel
- (3) Oxygen

Oxygen - since a fire needs to breath; Fuel - since a fire needs to burn something; and Heat - since it's a fire, after all, and a fire needs heat to get started, and then creates heat to keep going.

If you take away any one of these three ingredients, the fire is extinguished. And if you can avoid putting these three things together, you can prevent fires from starting in the first place.

In today's First Reading, we hear the Prophet Isaiah proclaiming:

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;*

Any one of us who has been baptized could say the same thing. At Baptism, we are all anointed with Sacred Chrism; as well as when we are Confirmed. Additionally, priests and bishops are anointed on the hands and head during Ordination.

In the Second Reading, we hear St. Paul tell the Thessalonians:

Do not quench the Spirit.

And this is very good advice, of course, for maintaining a solid spiritual life.

In the lines leading up to this admonition not to quench the Spirit; St. Paul gives a sort of "Spiritual Fire Triangle" for keeping our spiritual fires burning.

He tells us:

*Rejoice always.
Pray without ceasing.
In all circumstances give thanks*

Gratitude - which is our acknowledgment of God's bounty in our lives; Prayer - which is our communication ... a crucial part of our relationship ... with God; and Joy - which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit ... and the result of a solid relationship with God.

If we lose any one of these three spiritual ingredients, we run the risk of quenching the Fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives ... and extinguishing our spiritual life.

Gratitude is the life-breath of our spiritual life; Prayer is the fuel that feeds the spiritual life; and Joy not only is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, but kindles and sustains us spiritually.

Today, by the way, is traditionally known as *Gaudete Sunday*. The Latin word *gaudete* means 'rejoice.' And we hear that word repeated throughout the liturgy in the Scripture readings and antiphons.

Additionally, this is one of two Sundays in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church where Rose vestments are allowed as an option. We always see the 'pink' candle on the Advent wreath; and it takes a certain amount of security in one's masculinity to wear pink or rose vestments. And it's awfully difficult to take yourself too seriously when you're wearing pink.

The bottom line is - that in the midst of our preparations during Advent, that things can get so heavy as to squash our Joy. We may get so wrapped up in getting ready for Christmas that it passes right by us.

At this, the half-way point of Advent, the lighter color of pink or rose (instead of violet or purple) reminds us to 'lighten up' and to be joyful. And if we allow that joy to heat up our spiritual life, let us also feed the fire with the fuel of prayer and the breath of gratitude ... so that we might be burning brightly with the Fire of the Holy Spirit ... as we move through the half-way point ... and closer to the great Solemnity of the Incarnation.

Rejoice in the Lord always ... Indeed, the Lord is near.