

Today is the Third Sunday in Advent. Half of the Sundays of this Season of Advent have come and gone, and even this one will soon be past. The Church uses colors to indicate the seasons of the Church year. And while I'm not going to go into all of them, I want to indicate just why I'm wearing pink.

This Sunday is known as *Gaudete* Sunday – from the Entrance Antiphon, which admonishes us to “*Rejoice in the Lord always*” reminding us that “*the Lord is near.*” Near metaphorically as we progress through the four weeks of Advent, and also near in reality: in the joining together as members of Christ's body, in the Word of God we hear from Sacred Scripture, but most especially in the Eucharist which will soon appear on this altar – Jesus Christ: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

The pink, or “rose” as the Church calls it, should be a signal to us of two things. First, that we've made it halfway through Advent. Christmas is coming, and it's coming soon. Second, that we are already halfway through Advent. And time is running short to prepare.

And so the “rose” vestment is a sign of both joy that we are moving forward, and a warning that time is running short.

One could argue that there is a bit of confusion on just what “*joy*” means. As far as connotations, we can tend to blur joy with happiness, and the meanings of each, then, can become blurred as well.

But joy and happiness are two totally different things.

Happiness as a feeling is externally driven. We are happy when our circumstances are a particular way. A certain time of year, a certain group of people or a certain person, a particular food or meal, a special place, or an eagerly expected gift or surprise.

Yet if we cannot align all of those things, or a someone or something moves out of our life, or we move away from a particular place, or a gift wears out or is lost, or a surprise is found out – the feeling of happiness can fade away, leaving us looking for something more.

Joy, on the other hand, is not a feeling. Nor is joy derived from our environment or circumstances.

Joy come from within, welling up and surrounding – almost embracing – an individual. Joy permeates all things and all circumstances, regardless of whether they are “good” or “bad” ... “plentiful” or “sparse” ... “favorable” or “unfavorable” ... “plus” or “minus.”

While happiness is momentary, relying on certain conditions being met; joy comes from living in the moment, and influences every situation.

A psychologist has summarized it as this:

*Joy comes when
you make peace with
who you are,
where you are,
why you are, and
who you are not with.*

Indeed, in today's second reading from St. Paul to the Thessalonians, he tells us:

*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.
In all circumstances give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*

Joy, gratitude, and prayer are all found in the moment – not from external circumstances. Biblical scholars consider this particular letter to be one of St. Paul's first. Written at the time he commenced his ministry – full of hope and eager expectation at what lies ahead.

Yet the verse from his Letter to the Philippians, where Paul admonishes us to “*Rejoice in the Lord always*” as well as to be thankful and prayerful was written when he was in prison. And a first century prison certainly does not have the surroundings or ambiance that would compel anyone toward happiness. But St. Paul can still rejoice because He is at peace with God and himself, and his circumstances.

In the Gospel, we again confront St. John the Baptist, who this time is being interrogated by the authorities as to just who he is. It would seem that the levites and the priests were certainly *not* at peace with who John was, or where he was, or what he was doing. Yet John was. And they are confused. As we move toward the close of Advent 2014, let us pray for the graces we need to trade mere happiness for joy. Let us rest in God's peace, and realize that if He is comfortable with who we are, where we are, and why we are ... then through faith, so too should we.

May the Eucharist we receive today – the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ – supply our every need to fill us to overflowing with God's grace and embrace us in His mercy ... that we might truly know the immense joy of this Holy Season ... in Christ Jesus Our Lord.