

3rd Sunday of Advent “We Will Not Surrender”

Fr. Frank Schuster

This year, I decided I needed to put up my Christmas tree earlier than I normally do. With everything weighing us down this year, I just felt that getting my Christmas decorations out sooner was the right thing to do. I was entertained that when I went to the tree lot a week ago, the guy there told me that he normally sells around 500 trees each season. This year, however, he said he had already sold 400 trees by the first few days of December and was down to his last shipment. I found that very curious. I have also been enjoying going around the neighborhoods and looking at people’s Christmas lights. It is something to do in the evening. I don’t know if it just me, but it seems that people’s yard displays are a lot more robust this year than in year’s past. Have you noticed that? And something about that just seemed right. You have heard me talk in the past about defiant joy. I think people’s instinct about Christmas decorations this year of all years is an example of this. We seem to be letting 2020 know that you can’t beat us. We will not surrender.

Having said that, I believe the Church has this same attitude every year by giving us the season of Advent. The season of Advent can be understood first and foremost as a season of hope. As many of you know by now, the season of Advent has two themes to it. The first anticipates the second coming of Jesus at the end of time. The second theme of Advent is our joyful celebration of the events surrounding our savior’s birth on Christmas morning. The color of Advent is violet. However, even the color violet can be associated with that time after the darkest part of night when hints of dawn can be seen in the East. And so, violet in the Advent sense can be understood as a color of hope that Jesus will be here soon.

And just in case we miss that basic message, midway through Advent there is a Sunday that sticks out like a sore thumb. This weekend we celebrate Gaudete Sunday where everything from our readings, the candle we lit in our Advent wreath, to the rose vestment that I am wearing all accentuate our joy that, even in the darkest of seasons, the light of Christ is victorious over the darkness of our world.

Isaiah says it in our first reading, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.” St. Paul says it in our second reading, “Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always!” This is what St. Paul challenges us to do this Sunday: “Rejoice always! In all circumstances give thanks. Do not quench the Spirit! Refrain from any kind of evil.” And in our Gospel reading, we have St. John the Baptist testifying to the light so that all might believe and be joyful that Christ our light is dawning on the horizon.

And so, what is the moral of this feast day? Here we are in the darkest time of year and the Church is reminding us that God has created us to be joyful. Joy is a gift from God, but joy is also a choice and sometimes a defiant one grounded on hope, on the hope only Jesus can give us. What does this mean for us this week? We can ask ourselves: what is it about Jesus that can offer me hope right now in the future and give me a reason to rejoice in the face of everything that is weighing me down? With all the reasons not to be merry this year, what are the areas in my life I simply need to choose joy right now based on my faith and hope in Jesus Christ? This is the best time in Advent to really think about this because time is running out. As St. John the Baptist reminds us, it is time to make straight the way of the Lord.