

Third Sunday of Advent
Dec. 10 & 11, 2016

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters.

And here we are in the year of 2016, at the third Sunday of Advent, and we may still hear the hymn in our minds:

O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

And we see that the third candle on the Advent wreath shows not the purple color of repentance for our sinfulness, but the pink color of hope and joy of forgiveness. Rejoice! Rejoice! Because indeed the Son of God, the Son of Mary, shall come to us and will set us free.

I looked out the window this morning and what I saw was a dismal sight of winter. It was early Saturday and there was silence on the collage campus, and nothing moved on the snow covered earth. I said, 'There is not much to rejoice about all this, is there?' So I said to myself, 'Since this is certainly not it, let me find out, what kind of joy the third Sunday of Advent is about.

In the Summer of 1960, I spent a two weeks long vacation at St. Beuno's, in a Jesuit retreat house in Northern Whales. The house was built on the top of a cliff, looking at the ocean between England and Ireland. I was told that on a good clear day one can see Ireland from there. But such a clear day in Northern Whales only happens about once in a century. Actually it was raining day and night for nearly a whole week. But then the rain stopped and finally I could go out and look around. First I went to the edge of the cliff and looked at the water. It was all gray. The sky was gray. The seagulls flying and crying in the wind looked gray. There was the body of a dead whale at the bottom of the cliff washed out by the waves. As I walked along the road I got to the outskirts of a small village. All the houses were built of gray stones. There was a little boy standing outside doing nothing, just standing there. Then a voice came from the darkness of the window behind him saying, 'Come in immediately! Don't break the Sabbath!' "Gray souls," I said to myself. My Sisters and Brothers, I do not think we find the joy of the third Sunday of Advent in this experience. So how do we find it?

I remember another time. It was Christmas eve. I could not have been more than four or five years old. My brother and I got all sorts of presents. I liked mechanical toys. And there was a moment when I disappeared under the Christmas tree and tried to take my new toys apart to see what makes them tick. Yes, that was an exciting moment but my father pulled me out from under the Christmas tree to extend the lifespan of my presents if possible a few more days. It was Christmas and yet it all ended with broken toys in great need of repair. No, that was not the moment of Advent joy either.

And then, now more than 2000 years ago, JESUS came to us and set us free from the slavery to sin and evil. This Thursday we celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin Mary. In the Gospel we read that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a young girl in Nazareth whose name was Mary, and invited her to become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Her answer was simply, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me as you say." My dear Sisters and Brothers, these words of Mary were the key that opened for us a world of immense treasures of God's Love and Mercy! And that is that gives us true joy, the joy of the third Sunday of Advent and the true joy of Christmas. The joy that is deep and is unshakeable. The joy, a true response to our redemption in God's loving and merciful presence. Rejoice! Because indeed the Son of God, Jesus, also the Son of Mary, has come to us to forgive our sins, and set us free. So we truly rejoice and are very humbly very grateful. Amen.