December 17, 2017
Third Sunday of Advent:
“Making Room in Our Life for God to Help us REJOICE”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1  Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11
The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.

I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels. As the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise spring up before all the nations.

Reading 2  1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

Gospel  John 1:6-8, 19-28
A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, “Who are you?” he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, “I am not the Christ.” So they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” So they said to him, “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?” He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord,” as Isaiah the prophet said.” Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.” This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

HOMILY
A priest, a minister and a guru were discussing the best positions for prayer, while a telephone repairman worked nearby. “Kneeling is definitely the best way to pray,” the priest noted. “No,” argued the minister, “I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven above.” “I believe that you are both wrong,” the guru claimed, “the most effective prayer position is lying down on the floor.” Close enough to hear the conversation, the repairman could contain himself no longer and interrupted them: “Hey, guys, the best praying I ever did was when I was hanging upside down from a telephone pole.”
Humor … joy … REJOICE! … Today we celebrate REJOICE Sunday, or Gaudete Sunday, using the Latin. Every year, on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, the Church asks us to REJOICE, to relax just a little from the penitential mood of Advent, to reflect on, and to celebrate, the coming of Jesus Christ to us not once, not twice, but THREE times! Of course, with Christmas Day just a little over a week away, our immediate thoughts and focus are likely on His first coming, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus … God … becoming one of us – linking humanity with divinity – and – sorry Hallmark Channel, Lifetime and the others – an incredible miracle that is the true message of Christmas and the real reason we should be celebrating the holyday. REJOICE! – We celebrate Jesus’ coming in Bethlehem. /// Second, we reflect on and we celebrate Jesus’ coming at the end of time – we began our new Church year a few weeks ago with the start of Advent, but the Gospel message just before that was on the coming of Jesus at the end times, for the Final Judgment, when Jesus will welcome eternally into God’s Kingdom of Heaven those who responded positively to His Gospel message. REJOICE! – We celebrate Jesus’ coming at the end of time. /// And, we reflect on and we celebrate the third coming of Jesus – the coming of Jesus into our own life, our personal acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and our willingness to try and live out His Gospel message as an important part of our everyday life. As you probably know, that Gospel message is:

--- A message of faith – of recognizing who God is in our lives;
--- A message of love – of understanding that God will always love us, that God has infinite love for each of us, no matter what;
--- A message of hope – of longing for that eternal company with Jesus in Heaven;
--- A message of peace – of recognizing our sinfulness and our desire to reconcile our relationship with God and with others, if only we ask;
--- A message of response – of responding to God’s love by loving God and neighbor, and of sharing the Gospel message with others.

So, REJOICE! – We celebrate the coming of Jesus into our own life.

That rejoicing, that celebration of joy, is found throughout today’s readings. Isaiah’s passage shouts with joy, especially evidenced by, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.” And Paul tells the Thessalonians to “Rejoice always.” And John the Baptist’s joy is shown by his actions – preparing the way of the Lord.

JOY! Happiness! We DO have a lot to be thankful for, and to be joyful for. But … we know we live in a broken world – we know that our life isn’t perfect, and our world is far from perfect. We can look inside ourselves, we can look in the lives of others we know and love, and we see that brokenness in various forms … and a lack of peace wherever we look. How can we find joy in the middle of all of this? How can we help change the world to make it fairer, more equitable, more peaceful? How can we find the joy and peace of Christmas Day more often throughout the year, as some greeting cards suggest? Well, the simple answer is … we can’t. Or, at least, we can’t do it very well unless we have God’s help. Now, maybe we have filled our lives so much that we have hidden the Gospel message, hidden God, for whatever reason. Maybe we need to more fully realize who God is and how important God needs to be in our life, so that we can truly find joy. We can only do it when we find room in our hearts, and our life, for God. Remember that the innkeeper in Bethlehem told Mary and Joseph that he had no room for them or the baby about to be born – he had no room for Jesus.
Maybe we need to make more room in our life, in our personal inn, for Jesus, more time to listen to God, more time to spend in prayer with God, to discern what can be done to effect positive change, what can be done to bring an inner peace, to truly find joy. And, it’s been said that we need to have that peace within ourselves before we can help others find peace. Remember that all things are possible with God.

This Advent, we have been encouraged to find quiet time and silence, to be able to reflect on hearing the voice of God at all times but especially during this noisy holiday season. The bulletin has been promoting silence, as has the pause at the end of our 1st and 2nd readings. The purpose is to push aside the noise, the distractions, the busyness, even the internal conflicts, to make room for God to speak to us, and to have us speak with God in prayer. St. Paul tells us in today’s reading, “Pray without ceasing.” Basically, leave more room for God, to listen to God, to talk with God in prayer, to be aware of God’s presence often. If you heard Fr. Bob’s homily last weekend, you may remember the conflict he mentioned about hearing his GPS directions while simultaneously listening to the radio, which he loves to do. And then there’s Google Home. It’s an electronic personal assistant, like Amazon’s Echo – it can play music you ask for, it can make phone calls for you, you can ask it questions, even control appliances linked into it. But, if the volume is turned up too high with music, or the television is on in the background, or others are talking, it can get confused and not hear you or not respond. I find myself being like that – it is very difficult for me to pray, to talk with God, to listen to God, when there are external or even internal distractions – even those that may seem relatively minor.

And then there is time – how often do we say how busy we are … too busy to pray, for church, for friendship, for anything, even for God. Maybe we have filled our lives with those not-so-important things – you might have some examples you can think of – or even the dangerous things, like addictions. Returning again to St. Paul: “Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.” He is encouraging us to try and find more room in our lives for the worthwhile things, and for God.

Besides quiet prayer, other ways to increase room for God in our lives and in the lives of others:

- set a good Christian example towards others, it will become a way of life;
- find a religious gift to give others this Christmas;
- send religious cards instead of secular ones, or add a holy card or a few pertinent words to the secular ones;
- say grace before each meal;
- read books, listen to CD’s and watch videos that pertain to our faith – maybe sign-up for FORMED, or use it more often, if already signed-up;
- do an examination of conscience each evening, reviewing the day’s events and our response;
- spend time before the Eucharist in adoration;
- become more active in faith-oriented activities, maybe bible-study, or Discovering Christ;
- besides regular Sunday attendance, come to Mass one other time a week.

If we each try and make God a priority in our life, make quiet time to pray with God and listen to God, and try to live the Gospel message of faith, hope, love, peace and response – we can each experience the true joy that the Gospel message offers and our life can get better. Our inner peace can improve, and we may be more effective in helping others find peace and joy more often by finding God in their lives.

And so, as we enter a new Church year, we REJOICE – we rejoice in God’s love. Our lives will be better, our world will be better.