

**Third Week of Advent  
December 13, 2015**

We heard in our second reading today St. Paul saying “Brothers and sisters: rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice...” The word for rejoice in Latin is *gaudete*, so quite naturally this Sunday is called *Gaudete* Sunday.

But in the shadow of the recent tragic events in San Bernardino, perhaps our hearts are reluctant to embrace the joy that today’s readings call for.

People who ask the question, “How can God allow such a thing to happen?” search, perhaps in vain to find an answer. Perhaps there is no satisfactory answer. I believe there is, but today is a day for praying for the victims of all violence and their families and, most especially, how we can respond in a hopeful, positive and helpful way.

Leon Bloy, the great French Catholic philosopher wrote that joy is the infallible mark of a Christian.

There have hardly been fewer times in human history when there has been a greater need for real Christians who are filled with joy. The forces of darkness and gloom, the principalities and powers of this world, the bitterly cold atmosphere of a loveless society that sees others as only useful or to be victimized, seem to be overwhelming.

Yet it was on a night two-thousand years ago, with the forces of evil and despair fully in command -- that the angels’ joyful cry broke through the dark gloom . . . and an unqueachable light shined in the darkness.

*Gaudete* Sunday reminds us that we bear within our hearts the power to make the birth of Jesus Christ repeat itself again and again at ever-higher levels in the cycles of

our lives.

It remains for each of us to enter into the hearts of those around us who live in dreary and depressing darkness of soul in order to give them cause to rejoice. We can announce to those living in a rut that there is a way out.

We can tell those who have sold life short that they should invest in it . . . to go to those who live gripped by a vision that everything's wrong in the world and give them a different vision, to see reality in a different light, to announce to those who live in darkness that they can see the world in the great light of Jesus Christ.

The recent tragedy in San Bernardino reminds us that we live in a world filled with violence, suffering and confusion; and we might well have expectations of how God will intervene with some demonstration of superior power to make things right.

But Jesus knew that only the humble power of God's mercy can overcome the reign of evil and bring about a new kingdom of justice and peace. Love and mercy, which seem so weak, so impractical, so foolish in the face of evil, really are the only forces that can change the human heart.

Advent offers us the perfect opportunity to put all that is hurting, stained, and impoverished in our lives in front of the Lord.

Only then are we able, like John, to be freed of our own expectations and to welcome the coming of the Lord and his way of mercy. Then we, like John, can prepare the way for others to welcome the Lord's coming.