

**Third Sunday of Advent, C 2018
Homily by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS**

**Obviously, if you think about it, a word that stands out
in the readings today is "rejoice."**

**We've been talking these past few weeks about Advent being a time
to be schooled in patience, waiting, and expecting joyfully.**

**This week, it seems our schooling is a lesson in joy.
The readings are very blunt and straightforward
... rejoice ... that's an order, ready or not.
Without checking out just what people are feeling,
what they're facing in their lives
the writer glibly says, "rejoice."
Almost seems like someone coming up to you
when you're in a really dark, glum, desperate, mean, lonely kind of place
and saying "Oh, just cheer up!"**

**Are we expected to just turn on JOY?
It almost seems like that ... but not really.**

**In today's first reading, God's prophet, Zephaniah,
assures all of us that God enJOYS us;
God, the prophet says, rejoices over us with gladness
and we are being renewed in God's love.
To be joyful is to be gifted with a deep conviction
that things are working out as they should,
for the good, as God intends.**

**Joy is not something you make yourself be or do.
Joy is a gift you ask for, you pray for.
And Jesus assures us, if you ask ... seek ... knock
you will receive — the gift will be given.**

**Being a joyful person does not mean walking around
with a smile painted on your face all the time.
Sometimes joyful people can also be very sad or angry; in very dark places.
Pope Francis exhibits the gift of joy.
He is a joyful man, that's so evident.
Yet he's not always smiling.**

**People who are joyful exhibit a lightness of spirit,
a deep sense of confidence and well-being.**

**Because they have this deep sense of joy, of well-being,
then kindness seems to come more easily.
St. Paul said to us today: "I say 'rejoice,' let the gift of God's joy fill you.
... Then your kindness should be evident to all.**

And the peace of God will guard your heart and mind."

**Steve Grigsby is a man who works here at the Motherhouse.
He's responsible for seeing that the building is kept in good repair
and that everyone is safe.**

**The other day, I passed Steve and it turned out he was carrying his 2-year-old
son. I think the two of them radiated what the gift of joy looks like.
That's what our relationship with God is meant to look like, be like.**

**In the Gospel reading for today, people ask John the Baptist
if he is "the Christ."**

**The Greek word "Christos" refers to someone who has been anointed
and sent on mission.**

In Hebrew, the word is "Messiah."

Christ is not Jesus' surname.

John doesn't answer the question "Are you the Christ?" directly.

In reality his answer ends up being something like this.

They ask "are you the Christ . . . the anointed, the messiah, the sent one."

**John says, in a manner of speaking, "Sure, I'm anointed . . . sent by God . . .
just like you are, like we all are."**

Now none of us does our Christ-mission perfectly.

There is, however, one in our midst, John says, who is the perfect Christ.

He models/teaches you what it's like for you to be "Christ."

John, it says, baptizes.

Baptize is a synonym for lots of other words.

**To be baptized is to be
immersed in, drenched with, drowned in,
overflowing with . . .**

**The word carries with it a sense of a bath of pain, a cup of sorrow:
it also implies cleansing, burning, purifying and transforming.**

John says in effect to all those who ask him "What shall I do?"

"Under the reign of God, your life and what you do with it matters.

Whatever your role — tax collector, soldier, butcher, baker

— live it justly and the world will be a better place.'

So we're back to being schooled.

**At the end of the day, the liturgy's exhortation to rejoice
has little to do with mood and much to do with waking up
to the good news of the Incarnation, GOD living with and in us.**

The way of life Jesus schools us in is both consoling and demanding.

While most of us do not face exile or imprisonment,

we do face the challenges of living justly and sharing with the needy.

The gift of joy is an essential component of any authentic Christian life.

**Let's keep seeking, asking, knocking . . .
praying to be schooled by the Holy Spirit in the gift of joy.**