

3rd Sunday in Advent, B, December 11, 2005.

Joy in Stewardship.

Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11; Lk 1:46-54; 1Thes 5:16-24; John 1:6-8,19-28.

A. Introduction.

Today is Gaudete Sunday. The third Sunday of Advent means we are halfway to the feast of our Savior's birthday. We light roses candles, and I wear a rose vestment to represent JOY! Gaudete is Latin for "REJOICE!" St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians said "**Rejoice always!**"

B. On Christian Joy – Pope Paul the Sixth.

Pope Paul the Sixth wrote an apostolic exhortation called "*On Christian Joy.*" He says, "technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for *pleasure*, but it has great difficulty in generating *joy*. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual." Pope Paul was describing what the prophet Isaiah wrote in our first reading: "**I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.**"

C. True Joy in the Lord.

How do we obtain joy? Joy is long term, joy is lasting. What gives us a lasting joyful feeling? How can we receive the joy that Isaiah and Pope Paul speak of? One way is to reach out to our brothers and sisters. St. Peter writes "**As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied graces**" (1 Peter 4:10). We give to Jesus as we give to others. Each individual and parish is called to be generous in giving of time, talent, and treasure to Jesus, in the areas of hospitality, prayer, formation, and service. This "Way of Life" is called STEWARDSHIP. By living this STEWARDSHIP, we obtain the joy of God.

D. Stewardship.

The word “Stewardship” contains many ideas: sharing, responsibility, cooperation, collaboration, use of God’s goods, and many others. Stewardship is not a program, not a commandment, but rather Stewardship is a way of life in the example of Jesus. This phrase explains the idea very simply: “Gratefully Receiving; Generously Returning.” We receive many gifts from the Lord; we need to return gifts generously to Him, and to each other, and to the poor.

We have three parts to Stewardship: time, talent, and treasure; and four pillars of Stewardship: hospitality, prayer, formation, and service.

E. Time, Talent, and Treasure.

God gives us time, 168 hours each week. How do we use it? How many hours do we give back to Him? We are giving one hour right now at Holy Mass – Thank you and thanks be to God. We give other hours when we help our families, our parish, and our community. We give thanks to God for time; we give some of this time back to Him, our family, parish, community, and the poor. In this Stewardship way of life, we rejoice with the Lord.

Jesus gives us talent. I have a talent as a preacher, but not a talent as a cook! You have talents as musicians, mechanics, teachers, cooks, and many others. These talents are from God, how do we use them for His glory? How do we use our talents for our families, parish, community, and the poor? When we use our talents, we live Stewardship, with the joy of Jesus.

The Lord gives us treasure. We have jobs, with a salary or wage. Thanks be to God for our health, talent, experience, and employment! This is His gift! We need to give part of this income to God. This is an action of thanksgiving. Remember, “Gratefully Receiving; Generously Returning.” When we give money in the collection basket at Holy Mass, we give to God, the parish, and the poor. When we give our treasure to the Lord, we live the way of Stewardship, with the joy of God.

F. Pillars: Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service.

Hospitality is the first pillar of Stewardship. In this time of Advent, we welcome our relatives and neighbors with joy. This is a characteristic of hospitality: joy. We are very pleased with the life that Jesus gave us. He is working in our lives. And our joy comes when we know that Jesus is with us. We need to demonstrate this joy to each other. For example, the Greeters/Ushers at Mass give welcome and hospitality before Mass. Friendly, with smiling faces, they give welcome to the people as they join our vibrant community for worship.

The Psalmist wrote “**Lord, incline your ear to me; hear my word**” (17). The Scriptures are full of descriptions of prayer. Prayer is our intimate communication with God. We pray fervently, and also, we attentively listen with our hearts. We talk a lot with our friends, don't we? Do we also talk and listen a lot with our Dear Savior? Prayer is an important pillar of Stewardship. We feel joy in our hearts with this communication with God.

Formation in the Catholic Faith is the third pillar of Stewardship. In the Gospel of Luke (21), Jesus is called “**Teacher,**” and He said, “**I will give to you words of wisdom.**” Are we learning the Word of God each week, each day? We desire to grow in our faith. For example, it's very important that we take classes in preparation for the sacraments. Classes for Baptism, First Confession, First Communion, Confirmation, and Matrimony by a priest are good opportunities to grow in the faith of Jesus Christ. The sacraments give the gift of grace from God. Catechism classes for children, youth, and adults give us the joy of the Lord. His way of formation gives us the life of Stewardship.

Service is the final pillar of Stewardship. Three weeks ago we celebrated the feast of Christ the King. A true king is a servant of his people, for the good of all the people. For example, Pope Benedict, the earthly leader of our Church, has the title of “Servant of the Servants!” Yes, we are called to a life of service to each other. Jesus demonstrated this service, especially on the cross, when He gave His life for our sins. Your pastor serves you, right? You, as good workers in the vineyard of the Lord, serve your families, parish, community, and the poor. Finishing a project of service gives us great joy in the Lord. This is an example of the life of Stewardship.

G. Conclusion.

We follow Jesus not because it is an obligation. We follow Jesus because we are grateful. We have an “attitude of gratitude.” We live this attitude with a life of STEWARDSHIP. We use our time, talent, and treasure. We live a life of hospitality, prayer, formation, and service. With this life, we will have joy in our hearts. **“I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.”**

Jesus, thank you for true joy that only comes from You. Thank You for turning us toward being grateful, which give us lasting joy. We rejoice in You, our Savior!

NOTE: put in examples often of your particular parish.