

Homily on the 3rd Sunday of Advent
St. John Paul II Parish, Cedar Springs, Michigan
Mary Queen of Apostles Parish, Sand Lake, Michigan
Father Lam T. Le, Pastor
December 16, 2018

“One mightier than I is coming”
(Lk 3:16)

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I shall say it again: rejoice!” (Phil 4:4) is the entrance antiphon for the Mass on this 3rd Sunday of Advent. Because the beginning of this antiphon is *Gaudete*, the Latin word for “rejoice,” this day is known as *Gaudete/Rejoicing Sunday*. Indeed, the Scriptures for the 3rd Sunday of Advent take on a joyful tone as we continue our preparations for the Solemnity of our Savior’s Birth and ultimately for His Second Coming. Preparation for this week is captured in the phrase: ***joyfully live out our identity***.

Last week I was introduced to an article about the author of the famous Christmas Hymn, ***Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht (Silent Night, Holy Night)***. Did you know that this year the Church and the whole world celebrates the 200th anniversary of this hymn that was sung at St. Nicolaus of Oberndorf in Austria? The author of the text is Father Joseph Mohr and his friend Franz X. Gruber helped to arrange it. Father Mohr with the guitar in his hand sang the hymn beautifully for the first time in his church, which brought parishioners to tears! The message of God’s love to the human family was delivered in a song. How beautiful!

Leading toward this 200th anniversary, the hymn that now sets the tone for our December 25 celebration, the Solemnity that is only 2nd after Easter, was listed as the treasure of humanity. In regards to the author whose life was taken by illness of the lungs at the age of 56, people discovered that he had given away all that he had and seemed to live a very humble life. People could not find a picture of him because throughout his life he declined the request for photography. People found his grave and exhumed his body and used the head-bone as a way to help design a stature of him. Then, they transferred his body to the ***Stille Nacht*** chapel of St. Nicolaus of Oberndorf. People have questioned: why did Father Joseph Mohr not leave an image for posterity to remember him?

Reflecting on the Gospel of this 3rd Sunday of Advent, we can say that he walked in the line of St. John the Baptist. After “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3) the Baptist became famous. The Gospel passage, from Luke, showed that the crowds heard John the Baptist’s message and they asked him what they should do. He responded, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do the same” (Lk 3:11). He told tax collectors to stop collecting more than was prescribed and advised the soldiers to be satisfied with their wages (Lk 3:13-14). In other words, the Baptist told people to be good and generous stewards of all God’s gifts to them! Then, “the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ” (Lk 3:15). Temptation!!!! All it takes is for the Baptist to say: “I am he” and thus he would have all that this world would offer. The Baptist, however being true to his identity said: “one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals” (Lk 3:16). Elsewhere he also said: “he must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). The Baptist knew that his mission was to point out Christ to others and he did so joyfully, clearly, and diligently. Furthermore, if it was necessary, he was prepared to fade in the background so Christ would be made known. Father Joseph Mohr introduced the Savior of the world through the great hymn. Thus, it was not about him, but Christ the Lord, the Savior of the World!

By virtue of Baptism, we are all called to do as Father Mohr, walking in the line of the Baptist. More so during this advent, you and I must talk about Christ and introduce him to our family members, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. And in the context of *Gaudete Sunday* we are called to do so joyfully because to know the Lord is to know God’s love.

As Christmas draws near and we hear this hymn:

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child.

Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace!
Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia
Christ the Savior is born!
Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

Listening to these beautiful words, let's ask ourselves: have we done what John the Baptist and Father Mohr have done? Let's use the remainder of Advent well to continue the mission that the Baptist and Father Mohr have done; to joyfully live out our identity as missionary disciples of Christ! Amen.

Scriptural Readings:

Reading 1 ZEP 3:14-18A; Responsorial Psalm IS 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.6; Reading 2 PHIL 4:4-7; Alleluia IS 61:1 (Cited In Lk 4:18); Gospel LK 3:10-18
