

*Readings*

Is 61:1-2a, 10-11

Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

1 Thes 5:16-24

Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

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In the first reading this weekend, Isaiah says, “I **rejoice** heartily in the Lord.” We respond to this reading by singing (or saying) “My soul **rejoices** in my God.” In the second reading Saint Paul tells the community in Thessalonica to “**Rejoice** always.”

Having reflected for the past two weeks on the second coming of Jesus, next Monday we celebrate the first coming, of Jesus. We have many reasons to **rejoice**. We **rejoice** because even in our brokenness God loves us so much he sent his only son to free us from, and forgive our sins. We **rejoice** because as we celebrate Jesus’ birth (his first coming), as well as his life, death and resurrection, we realize that at his second coming we have the opportunity to see God face-to-face.

We **rejoice** because like Isaiah God has sent his Spirit and has anointed us in baptism and confirmation. We **rejoice** because the one “whose sandal strap we are not worthy to untie” wants us to proclaim the good news to those who have not heard it; to help heal those who have broken hearts; and to help free those who are enslaved or feel like prisoners in their own bodies.

We **rejoice** because like John the Baptist we realize that we were sent from God to be a witness and bring light where there is darkness. We know that there is darkness in our world: we see it today in Jerusalem, Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Russia, our own cities, neighborhoods, in our own families as well as in the mass shootings that occur so frequently.

Isaiah understood who he was, and what God's mission was for him, to usher in the age of salvation. John the Baptist also understood who he was and what God's mission was for him, to be a witness by being "the voice of one crying out in the desert."

Next Monday we celebrate one of the greatest events in history. We **rejoice** because God took on our flesh and set us free. We **rejoice** because God became a human and experienced everything that we experience except sin. We **rejoice** because Jesus came to give his life as a ransom, to reveal our heavenly God to us and to give us Eternal Life.

With many things that need to be addressed in the parish and in my personal life in the next week, I know as a priest and as a pastor how hard it is for me to keep all this in perspective. This is especially true this year when next Sunday in the morning it is the Fourth Sunday of Advent and in the afternoon it is Christmas Eve.

During the next week as we finish our shopping, wrapping the gifts, decorating the tree, finalizing our travel plans, and preparing Christmas dinner may we not lose sight of who, what and why we are **rejoicing**.