

# A Message from our Pastor

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Rev. Philip D. Reifenberg



December 13

Dear Parishioners,

Happy Gaudete Sunday. “gau-dé-te: rejoice! (latin) imperative form”

The Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally called “Gaudete Sunday” because of the liturgy’s “entrance antiphon” which quotes St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always.; again, I say rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.” (Philippians 4:4-5).

Back in the “old” days Advent, like Lent, was a penitential season – at least, it certainly felt that way! When the Church first started commemorating Advent as part of its liturgical calendar in the 6th Century, it was held to be a period of prolonged fasting, patterned after Lent – the time leading up to the celebration Easter. For most of its history in the West (the Church of the East, the Byzantine Church, doesn’t seem to follow this practice as closely), the Church has focused on fasting as an important if not central aspect of its Advent discipline. And ever since Pope Innocence III systematized liturgical colors for the Roman Catholic Church in the 12th Century, purple has been the color for Advent, both to symbolize Christ’s royalty and to remind the faithful of our sinful state which necessitated the coming of Christ to save us.

The liturgical reforms brought about by the Second Vatican Council shifted the emphasis of the Advent season from penitence to hope. Be that as it may, the Church had been celebrating Gaudete Sunday for centuries before that in order to provide a break, at least temporarily, from the somberness of Advent and to remind its people that the Lord really is near and that the end of the penitential season is in sight!

This year, perhaps Gaudete Sunday can serve a dual role: (1) its usual liturgical purpose of reminding us that Christmas is near and that the quasi-penitential season is rapidly drawing to a close, and (2) as encouragement in these COVID-dominated times to put up with all the temporary inconveniences and disruptions associated with social distancing and mask-wearing in the realization that nothing except heaven lasts forever!

And now, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I’m going to say it again: as you make plans for Christmas, I hope those plans include attending Mass if your personal circumstances permit it. But the Masses on Christmas Eve are shaping up to be pretty full, given the reduced capacities wrought by social distancing. So why not consider coming to Mass on Christmas Day? We are following the Sunday morning schedule on Christmas Day at both STA (8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.) and SJB (7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.). (Registration is required at SJB, so either register on-line or give Julie a call at 892-4006.)

Be healthy! Be safe! Rejoice!!!

Father Phil