



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF
"SAN PATRIZIO AL COLLE PRENESTINO"

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Third Sunday of Advent - "Gaudete", 16 December 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters of San Patrizio,

I am very happy to visit you and to celebrate the Blessed Eucharist with you and for you. I would first like to offer you a few thoughts in the light of the word of God that we have heard. On this Third Sunday of Advent, known as "Gaudete" Sunday, the Liturgy invites us to rejoice. [Advent](#) is a season of commitment and conversion in preparation for the Lord's coming, but today the Church gives us a foretaste of the joy of Christmas that is now at hand. In fact Advent is also a time of joy, because in this season expectation of the Lord's coming is awakened in the hearts of believers; looking forward to a person's arrival is always a cause of joy. This joyful dimension is present in the First of the Bible Readings of this Sunday. The Gospel on the other hand, corresponds to the other dimension that is characteristic of Advent: that of conversion with a view to the epiphany of the Lord proclaimed by John the Baptist.

The First Reading we have heard is an insistent invitation to rejoice. The passage begins with the words "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion... Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem" (Zeph 3:14); which is similar to that of the Angel's annunciation to Mary: "Hail, full of grace" (Lk 1:28). The essential reason why the daughter of Zion can be joyful is expressed in the affirmation we have just heard: "the Lord is in your midst" (Zeph 3:15, 17); this means literally "is in your womb", with a clear reference to the dwelling place of God in the Ark of the Covenant, always set in the midst of the People of Israel. The prophet wishes to tell us that there is no longer any

reason for distrust, discouragement, sorrow, whatever the situation that must be faced, because we are certain of the Lord's presence which alone suffices to calm and cheer hearts.

The Prophet Zephaniah, in addition, lets us know that this joy is reciprocal: we are invited to rejoice, but the Lord also rejoices in his relationship with us; indeed, the prophet writes: "he will exult over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (v. 17). The joy that is promised in this prophetic text, will find its fulfilment in Jesus, who is in the womb of Mary, the "Daughter of Zion", and in this way dwelt among us (cf Jn 1: 14). Indeed, in coming into the world he gives us his joy, just as he himself confides to his disciples: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (Jn 15:11). Jesus brings people salvation, a new relationship with God that overcomes evil and death, and brings true joy in this presence of the Lord who comes to lighten our paths that are all too often engulfed in shadows and in selfishness.

We can reflect on whether we are really aware of this fact that the Lord is present among us, that he is not a distant God but a God-with-us, a God in our midst who is with us here, who is in the Blessed Eucharist, he is with us in the living Church and we must be heralds of this presence of God. Thus God rejoices in us and we can attain joy: God exists, God is good and God is close.

In the Second Reading we have heard, St Paul invites the Christians of Philippi to rejoice in the Lord. Can we rejoice? And why should we rejoice? St Paul answers: because "the Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:5). In a few days we shall be celebrating Christmas, the Feast of the coming of God who made himself a child and our brother so as to be with us and to share in our human condition. We must rejoice in his closeness, in his presence, and must seek ever better to understand that he really is close, and thus be penetrated by the reality of God's goodness, joy at Christ being with us.

Paul says forcefully in another of his Letters that nothing can separate us from the love of God which was expressed in Christ. Sin alone can distance us from him, but this is a factor of separation that we ourselves introduce into our relationship with the Lord. Yet, even when we cut ourselves adrift, he does not cease to love us and continues to be close with his mercy, with his readiness to forgive and to embrace us in his love. Therefore, St Paul continues, we must never be anxious, we can always set our requests, our needs, our worries before the Lord "by prayer and supplication" (4:6). This is a great cause for joy: knowing that it is always possible to pray to the Lord and that the Lord hears us, that God is not distant, but really listens, he knows us; and knowing that he never rejects our prayers even if he does not always answer as we would like, but that he does answer. And the Apostle adds: pray "with thanksgiving" (*ibid.*).

The joy the Lord communicates to us must encounter grateful love in us. Indeed, our joy is complete when we recognize his mercy, when we become attentive to the signs of his goodness, if we truly perceive that this goodness of God is with us and thank him for all that we receive from

him every day. Those who selfishly welcome God's gifts fail to find true joy; but the hearts of those who make God's gifts an opportunity to love him with sincere gratitude and to communicate his love to others, are truly filled with joy. Let us remember that!

After the two Readings, let us come to the Gospel. Today's Gospel tells us that to receive the Lord who comes we must prepare ourselves by looking clearly at our behaviour in life. John the Baptist replies to the different people who ask him what they should do to be ready for the Messiah's coming (cf. Lk 3:10, 12, 14) that God asks for nothing extraordinary but that each one live in accordance with the criteria of solidarity and justice; without them we cannot prepare properly for the encounter with the Lord. Therefore let us too ask the Lord what he expects of us and what he wants us to do, and begin to understand that he does not demand anything extraordinary but rather that we live our normal life with rectitude and goodness.

Finally John the Baptist points out that we must follow with faithfulness and courage. First of all he denies that he himself is the Messiah and firmly proclaims: "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie (v. 16). Here we note John's deep humility in recognizing that his mission is to prepare the way for Jesus. Saying "I baptize you with water" cannot but make it clear that his action is symbolic. In fact he cannot eliminate and forgive sins: baptizing with water can only indicate that it is necessary to change one's life. At the same time, John proclaims the coming of the one who is "mightier than he" who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (*ibid.*). And, as we have heard, this great prophet uses strong images to invite people to conversion; however this is not in order to instil fear but rather to encourage them to receive God's love in the best possible way, as it alone can truly purify life. God makes himself a man like us to give us a hope that is sure: if we follow him, if we are consistent in living our Christian life, he will draw us to him, he will lead us to communion with him; and there will be in our hearts true joy and true peace, even in difficulty, even in moments of weakness.

Dear friends, I am glad to pray with you to the Lord who makes himself present in the Eucharist to be with us always. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Sector, Fr Fabio Fasciani, your parish priest, whom I thank for his kind words to me on behalf of the community in which he explained to me the situation of the parish and the spiritual wealth of parish life. I greet all the priests present. I greet all those who promote the work of the parish: the catechists, the choir members and the members of the various groups, and likewise those who adhere to the Neocatechumenal Way, committed to the mission here. I see with joy so many children who are following God's word at various levels, preparing for First Communion, for Confirmation and, after Confirmation, for life. Welcome! I am happy to see a living Church here! I extend my thoughts to the Oblates of Our Lady of the Rosary who live in the parish territory, and to all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, especially the elderly, the sick and those in difficulty. I pray for each and every one in this Holy Mass.

Your parish that developed on the Prenestino Hill between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1980s, after the initial difficulties due to the lack of structures and services, equipped itself with a beautiful new church, inaugurated in 2007 after a long wait. May this sacred building therefore be a privileged space for growing in knowledge and love of the One whom in a few days we shall welcome in the joy of Christmas as Redeemer of the world and our Saviour. Do not fail to come to see him often, to feel more forcefully his presence that gives strength.

I rejoice in the sense of belonging to your parish community which in the course of these years has become ever more mature and consolidated. I encourage you to continue to develop your pastoral co-responsibility in a perspective of authentic communion among all those present, who are called to live complementarity in diversity. In a special way I would like to remind you all of the importance and the centrality of the Eucharist in personal and community life. May Holy Mass be the centre of your Sunday. It should be rediscovered and lived as a day of God and of the community, a day in which to praise and celebrate the One who died and rose for our salvation and asks us to live together in the joy of a community open and ready to accept every person who is lonely or in a difficult situation. Likewise, I urge you to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, especially in this season of Advent.

I know all that you do to prepare children and young people for the sacraments of Christian life. The Year of Faith, which we are living, must become an opportunity to increase and consolidate the experience of catechesis, in such a way as to permit the whole district to know and to deepen its knowledge of the Creed of the Church and to meet the Lord as a living Person. I address a special thought to families, in the hope that they may fulfil their vocation to love with generosity and perseverance.

The Pope also wishes to address a special word of affection and friendship to you, dear boys and girls and young people who are listening to me, and to your peers who live in this parish. May you feel you have lead roles to play in the new evangelization, putting your young energy, your enthusiasm and your talents at the service of God and of others in the community.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we said at the beginning of this celebration, today's liturgy calls us to joy and conversion. Let us open our spirit to this invitation; and let us hurry to meet the Lord who comes, invoking and imitating St Patrick, a great evangelizer, and the Virgin Mary who awaited and prepared silently and prayerfully for the Redeemer's birth. Amen!

