

Fr. Martin's Reflection – December 11, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we celebrate what is known as, **'Gaudéte, rejoice!'** because the Lord is near and the fourth Sunday of Lent says, **'Laetáre, lerúsalem, be joyful, Jerusalem, and all who love her!'** because she herself is loved by the Lord. The first two weeks of Advent is a time of penance and clearing the mind, heart, and soul of all the earthly distractions and sinfulness. The last two weeks is a time to prepare to **'rejoice,'** and **'be joyful'** because our Lord is coming.

Is it possible for us to get our heads around the idea that 'Our Lord' is coming? The challenge for all of us, especially for us who have seen many Christmases, is the spirit of Christmas is lost on us. A common cry is 'how commercial' it has become. The message all around us seems to be spend, spend, spend. The challenge for us as Christians is to try and not get swallowed up in this commercialism and loose sight of what Christmas is truly about. This time of the year the Knights of Columbus are usually inviting people to purchase a bumper sticker or magnet for the back of their cars stating, 'Keep Christ In Christmas.' For us to keep Christ in Christmas we first must ask, 'what does Christ's coming mean to me? Will his coming, or will I allow his coming, to have any impact on my life? Can I rejoice, can I be joyful and accept that I am loved by the Lord?

One of the saddest things I experience in confession is when people tell me that the sin they have committed is so unforgivable that not even God could forgive them – I quietly cry, I feel God's sadness. The birth of Jesus is a wonderful occasion, but the birth is only the beginning of the story, a story we all know that ended with Christ's suffering and death on the cross. Among the final words Jesus spoke were, 'Forgive them Father, they don't know what they do.' Think about it, these people physically brutalised Jesus and crucified him and he forgave them. Could any sin we commit top that? Do not let anything that you have done keep you from experiencing God's love and compassion.

Another sad experience I have in confession is when people come and say I don't have any sins to confess. The only thought that comes to me is, who are you comparing your life to? I know confession is not just about telling our sins, it really is coming into the presence of God's love, to feel God's embrace, to experience God's compassion and allow God to affirm us with the words, 'I am your God, and you are my child.'

I honestly believe if we are to fully experience and appreciate the **'Gaudéte'** and **'Laetáre'** of Christmas we need to remove the 'Stuff' that prevents us from rejoicing and truly experiencing the joy of Christ in our hearts and lives. Come to the wonderful sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent.

St. Mary Church, Bordentown – Tuesday, December 20, 7pm-8pm
Holy Assumption Church, Roebling – Wednesday, December 21, 7pm-8pm

Let us remember the words of St Paul to the Thessalonians:

"May the God of peace make you perfect and holy; and may you all be kept safe and blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has called you and God will not fail you."

Fr. Martin