

### **3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY in ADVENT (B-3)** (6:00 Sun.)

In the past 20 years or so, commercials for insurance companies, businesses, and elections have been created on the basis of fear. Fear is another way of saying, “False evidence accepted as real.” You have heard me say that fear is not of God. So what is of God? We have a number of hints today: Paul said: “Live always joyfully; pray always, give thanks at all times, since this is what God wants of us in Christ Jesus.” Isaiah said: “I delight in my Lord with all my soul and I am filled with joy in my God.” And the Psalm says: “My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.” It’s obvious, then, that to “Be joyful” is to be God-like.

You can tell a lot about a Church by looking at how people leave it after the services. What would people say about MHT? I believe they’d say that we are happy and filled with joy. We love what we do here. We find God here and we show God’s presence to others here. We serve the poor here. We fed 2000 families and the homeless men of San Jose last month. We find people jobs, we counsel those with problems, and we stand in solidarity with those who lost their homes and try to save those whose homes are legally stolen from them by our so-called trusted banking institutions. There is no such thing as an illegal person here.

We give our children a chance to make it to college by giving them a great education. We help their self-esteem to grow by showing them that this is their church, too, and not just the adults’ church. How great to see them do all what the adults do in ministry! How great to see them feel at home here! How great to see them becoming boys and girls for others in imitation of the adult men and women for others.

We have much to be joyful about. Joy is what heals fear. Joy is what is behind faith. Faith empowers; fear paralyzes and debilitates. Faith always points forward, fear always holds back. Just look at John the Baptist. Facing a grilling by the Pharisees, he fearlessly tells them that he

is not the Messiah. The angels and Jesus tell us to “Fear not.” “Fear not” is the message of Christmas, and we take joy in knowing that Jesus is the reason for the season.

With Jesus in our life, we have truly nothing to fear. If a Christian lives in fear, he/she is not a Christian, even if he/she is baptized, even if he/she claim Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. A joyless Christian is a contradiction in terms. And joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in a person or group. If a person/group is joyless, they are far from God.

If joy is at the center of a Jesus experience, then why might a Christian lose hope and live in fear? Perhaps one is caught up in the rat race of work, or the stress of debts, or the mask of wanting to appear to have more, or to be more beautiful, more “with it” than we really are. Perhaps we worry more about things than people. Perhaps we have not forgiven someone from our past. Whatever it might be, do we realize that Christ is there in the midst of the pain inviting us to be hopeful?

Do we let our children teach us how to live and relate? Watch them play. There is joy in their having fun. It’s easy to have fun and be joyful when children are around. Children are signs of life. That is why I want us to be a child-friendly, youth-friendly haven! Look around us and you will find reasons to be joyful.

Jesus was born into the poverty of a homeless family. He became a refugee to an unknown land, to hide from killers. He grew up knowing the pain of the death of St. Joseph. He grew up knowing the pain of the poor. When he was ready, he fearlessly took on the plight of the have-nots and challenged the haves of his day to share. If we do the same we will escape the trap of fear and depression. Let us ready the mangers of our hearts to welcome the one who loved us into being by welcoming those in whom he was born.