



This Third Sunday of Advent is called, Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” means to be glad or to rejoice. Today’s liturgy is marked with an ambiance of joy—the joy that only God can give, the joy that the world cannot take away. In the Second Reading St. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, exhorts us:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

Why do we rejoice? According to St. Paul, we rejoice simply because we perceive the Lord is near. Isn’t that reason enough? Here are a couple of witnesses:

Dostoevsky: “Our joy is being close to God, to be in friendship with God ... This joy does not consist in an absence of pain or sorrow, but rather in a presence, the presence of God.”

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: “I have found my heaven on earth because heaven is God and God is in my soul. The day I began to understand this, my whole life was filled with a wonderful light. This is my secret to happiness, and I must communicate it to those I love.”

In the Gospel this week, St. John the Baptist passionately exhorts the people to prepare for the coming of the Lord. In order for us to know the joy of the Lord, we must be ready to turn away from our sins, after all, it is sin that prevents us from perceiving the nearness of the Lord – sin, in effect, blinds us to the beauty and love of God which is our ultimate source of joy. St. John the Baptist exhorts the crowds: do not be selfish or greedy, give to those in need. To the tax collectors he exhorts: be honest! Be Just! To the soldiers he exhorts: do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse, be satisfied with your wages. In summary, the Scriptures say, “Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people” Lk 10:18). Why are these exhortations “good news”? Because they teach us the way to be near to God.

So, we must ask ourselves, what are the vices that keep us from being closer to God? Why should we care? Why should we make the effort? The First Reading in today’s Advent Mass gives us a taste of what we are missing if we choose to ignore the exhortations of John the Baptist:

“Shout for joy, daughter Zion! sing joyfully, Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has removed the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies; The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, Zion, do not be discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior, Who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, Who will sing joyfully because of you, as on festival days. I will remove disaster from among you, so that no one may recount your disgrace.” (Zephaniah 3:14–18, NABRE)

May God, in His mercy, help us to know the joy of our salvation! **THE LORD IS NEAR!!**

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples





Saint Peter Canisius

Feast Day: 21 December

Born: May 8, 1521

Died: December 21, 1597

Canonized: May 21, 1925 by Pope Pius XI

The energetic life of Peter Canisius should demolish any stereotypes we may have of the life of a saint as dull or routine. Peter lived his 76 years at a pace which must be considered heroic, even in our time of rapid change. A man blessed with many talents; Peter is an excellent example of the scriptural man who uses his talents for the sake of the Lord's work. Although Peter once accused himself of idleness in his youth, he could not have been idle too long, for at the age of 19 he received a master's degree from the university at Cologne. Soon afterwards he joined the recently formed Society of Jesus. At this early age Peter had already taken up a practice he continued throughout his life—a process of study, reflection, prayer, and writing. He could often be found visiting the sick or imprisoned, even when his assigned duties in other areas were more than enough to keep most people fully occupied.

In 1547, Peter attended several sessions of the Council of Trent, whose decrees he was later assigned to implement. Peter taught in several universities and was instrumental in establishing many colleges and seminaries. He wrote a catechism that explained the Catholic faith in a way that common people could understand—a great need of that age. In the late 16th century, when open hostility typified relations between Catholics and Protestants, Peter Canisius advised charity and moderation. He opposed theological debates with Protestant leaders and, in general, discouraged discussion of Catholic distinctives such as indulgences, purgatory, and monastic vows with Protestants. He believed such efforts only heightened division and embittered relations. He articulated his views in this letter to his Jesuit superior:

“It is plainly wrong to meet non-Catholics with bitterness or to treat them with discourtesy. For this is nothing else than the reverse of Christ's example because it breaks the bruised reed and quenches the smoking flax. We ought to instruct with meekness those whom heresy has made bitter and suspicious, and has estranged from orthodox Catholics, especially from our fellow Jesuits. Thus, by whole-hearted charity and good will we may win them over to us in the Lord.

Again, it is a mistaken policy to behave in a contentious fashion and to start disputes about matters of belief with argumentative people who are disposed by their very natures to wrangling. Indeed, the fact of their being so constituted is a reason the more why such people should be attracted and won to the simplicity of the faith as much by example as by argument.”

At 70, Peter suffered a paralytic seizure, but he continued to preach and write with the aid of a secretary, until his death in his hometown of Nijmegen, Netherlands.

Reflection: Peter's untiring efforts are an apt example for those involved in the renewal of the Church or the growth of moral consciousness in business or government. Teachers can see in his life a passion for the transmission of truth. Whether we have much to give, as Peter Canisius did, or whether we have only a little to give, the important thing is to give our all. It is in this way that Peter is so exemplary for Christians in an age of rapid change when we are called to be in the world but not of the world.