

Today we celebrate *Gaudete Sunday*.

*Gaudete* is a *command*.

The command of *God* to His people:

To *Rejoice!*

This is but one of only *two* Sundays in the *year* where the *violet* colors of *repentance* –

*Blossom* and *burst alive* with a *glimpse* of the *rosy fruits* of *repentance* –

*Signified* by the *rose vestment* the priest wears –

And the *rose candle* we lit for this *third* Sunday of *Advent*.

*Repentance* means to turn *toward* our Messiah –

Our *ever-loving God* –

He *has come* – into the *flesh* of humanity –

In *all* its struggles and sufferings –

Ony to *lift* us *up* –

Into the *joy* of belonging to *God*.

*God's* love *shines* a *light* to *scatter* the darkness.

*His* love is like the beautiful rose that *blooms* –

*Even* in the cold and dark of *winter*.

[mention Christmas Hymn: *Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming*]

We *each* experience many kinds of *winters* in life.

Many forms of *struggles* and *sufferings* and *losses* and unquenched *desires*;

*Loneliness; aimlessness; fatigue; fear; doubt; distress.*

This is *every* human's experience.

But it is the love of *God* that *penetrates* even the *deepest* of our winters.

His *forsakes* His divine *privilege* to *lower* Himself

Into the *depths* of human *need* for Him.

The *Good* news in which we are called to *rejoice* –

Is quite *simply* –

That as *deep* as our wintery *darknesses* go –

The love of *God* goes even *deeper*.

And the command to *rejoice* becomes an act of *faith* in His *enduring* love –

An act of *hope* that *sparks* but a *speck* of *light* –

That *defies* the darkness –

That *bully* of the specter of death –

That is *scattered* by our Messiah –

Our *Christ* – our *Light* –

That *no* darkness can overcome.

Let us take *heart* in the face of our winters –

And *look* to that blooming *rose* –

That abiding *hope* in God –

That *no* winter can subdue.

I remember *one* little winter in my life –

When my *father* died quite *suddenly* –

Rather *instantaneously* –

Right in *front* of me.

*Although* his body lay *lifeless* –

His *eyes* and his whole *face... shined* with a *defiant* image of *joy*.

I like to believe that *precisely* at the moment of *death* –

My father's face had *seen* the Messiah –

And his heart *rejoiced* –

That *no* winter can *stop* the coming of *spring*!

Our *new* Bishop – *Mark* – is entering into our winter depths in *Albany*.

At his *installation* as our servant shepherd –

He's really *showed* his *heart* for our *longing* to see *springtime* again.

His face was *beaming* with great joy when he *surrendered* to the call to be our bishop.

And when He *spoke* of our Messiah who *comes* to us –

He even shed *tears* at this most beautiful *rose* of joyful hope in the *bloom* of *salvation*.

His *Motto* is a quote from St. *Andrew* –

Whose *feast* was *eclipsed* this year by the *first* Sunday of Advent – November 30<sup>th</sup>.

But *Andrew* was originally a disciple of John the *Baptist* –

Who *prepared* the way for Christ's *coming*.

And *John* – even from *his* winter of *prison* –

He wanted to make *sure* that his struggles actually bore *fruit* –

And he was *more* free locked up on death *row* –

Than those who *cannot* see the coming of the Messiah.

*Our* joy, *our* hope,

*Our* *encouragement* today and *every* day *is* that we have *seen* the Messiah.

And better *yet*, *He* sees *us*.

And no matter *what*, He's ready to *love* us.

Shall we *let* Him?

And having *dared* to hope –

Having *dared* to open *our* hearts to *Him* –

Can we join *all* disciples –

From the Great John the Baptist –

To Andrew and his brother *Peter* –

And to the little *child* Andrew brought to Jesus.

Jesus wanted to *feed* the 5,000 who were *hungry*.

And the boy had but 5 loaves of bread.

Jesus *took* what little the boy had to offer Him,

And Jesus supplied the *rest*.

*Whatever* our struggle or weakness or *lack* –

May we *bring* it to our Messiah –

And He *will* supply the *rest!*

His love endures *all* things.

May we *surrender* to that love –

A love that *convicts* us to be *faithful* –

To *endure* amidst life's challenges –

*Confident* that our spirits will *soar* in Christ –

Jesus *let* His love *plummet* into the *depths* of the human *heart*.

Be not afraid. Be *patient*.

Be *loving*. Be *kind*.

Rejoice!

We have *found* the Messiah.

And our Messiah has found *us*.

Let the *joy* of our faith in God *radiate* as a prophetic *sign* to others.

*Carry* this Messiah to those who cannot *see* past the darkness.

And *trust* in the Lord who says:

'*Rejoice* my child, because you are *here* with me *always* –

*Everything* I have is *yours* –

We must *celebrate* and *rejoice* –

Because your brother was *dead* – and has come to *life* again –

He was *lost* – and *now* has been *found!*'

Do not *hide* in the dark!

But cry out!

*Gaudete!* Rejoice!

*Nothing* can stop the light of Christ –

That *bloom* of divine love – like the *rose* in *winter*.