

3 Advent C

December 16, 2018

St. Patrick

Theme: An Advent joy which radiates from forgiveness celebrated and from hardships lived with grace

The third candle is lit, and we hear from St. Paul this Sunday, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: Rejoice!...The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything...”**

This past Thursday night, it was after 8:30, and our Advent Penance had just ended. Our pastoral assistant, Ro, and I began locking doors and turning off lights. The first thing Ro said to me, *“That was a very good turnout tonight!”* And my response: “Well, I won’t drive home tonight; I’ll glide home.” And then I added, without thinking, “I am filled with joy.”

Earlier in the day I had gone to confession. I sat across from another priest and voiced my sins. I felt uneasy, nervous. Then, during our Advent Penance service, I was on the receiving side, others one at a time sitting across from me and being honest, vulnerable.

By the end of the night, I felt joy because I had experienced God’s presence in our prayer together. I *knew* that the Risen Jesus was lifting the backpack of remorse and guilt from each of us. I have to admit, in an earlier season of my life, I had grown out of the need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It was a quaint relic in an earlier chapter of the sacrament, but we didn’t need it, I figured. Then, I heard about AA, Alcoholics Anonymous. A spiritual process, one of the suggested Twelve Steps is, **“Admitting to ourselves, to God, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”** The founders of AA knew that, if the recovering alcoholic didn’t voice his wrongs to another person, the heaviness of guilt wouldn’t be lifted, and the alcoholic would return to their drinking. I saw confession differently, then.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: Rejoice!...The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything...”

I experienced that joy. Many others, and I, were lighter, freed from the heaviness of remorse and shame.

Another ritual is part of my Advent preparation every December. It was earlier last week, the 49th year of the Christmas program at Madonna Learning Center, a school for children and young adults with disabilities (including Down syndrome and other disorders). It was founded by three Benedictine religious sisters in 1969.

Three of our St. Patrick families are part of Madonna. This year for the three Christmas programs, 2400 people came to watch. Parishioner Erin Williams, one of the teachers, was the director. Tears welled up in my eyes throughout the 2018 program, entitled “Sharing the Light.” A parishioner, Eason, was one of the “Keepers of the Light” throughout the show, as darkness tries to keep the light extinguished in our lives. Eason, and the four others who performed throughout the show with her, wore a lovely blue chiffon dress. And the youngest student at Madonna, parishioner Luke, was with his class in his white robe, as the song resounded, “This Little Light of Mine.” Oh, there was the student Ben who stood for darkness and made his presence again and again as, wearing a black cape, he growled menacingly, “Aghh...!” Finally, though, the light overtook him, and Ben flung away his dark cape of fear. The line from the Gospels, speaking of the Word Jesus, was highlighted: Jesus’ **“life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** (John 1:4-5). The finale of the show was the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, beautifully shown with the students by silhouette.

One twelve-year old girl, Abigail, fascinated me. She danced with others, but she danced with such grace and joy—with abandon she danced the joy of the light in Jesus. She wasn’t a light flicker, but a flame, radiating the joy as she danced, with no disability holding her back. St. Patrick’s: Are we not called to go beyond our disabilities holding us back...and radiate the joy of Jesus’ light?

Worrywarts might call the Apostle Paul silly, as he implores us, **“Do not worry about anything.”** Get real, worrywarts will say! Instead, Paul is languishing in a prison cell, unsure when he might be killed (Eventually he was beheaded), and he’s writing to a beloved church of his that’s bickering among its members. That’s real!

Graced with faith, Paul can write from behind bars, **“Rejoice always...The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything...”**

The third candle is lit. Indeed, the Lord is near, Jesus our Savior. May we be graced with joy, such that we truly know we are forgiven fully, and that his light radiates in our darkness. **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: Rejoice!...**

General Intercessions

December 16, 2018

3rd Sunday of Advent

*Deacon/Reader: Before reading the first petition, please say, “The response to each petition is, “**Come, Lord Jesus!**”*

**Free us, your church, from worry and fear, that we might truly experience the joy of Emmanuel in our lives;
we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Lead us, St. Patrick’s Parish, to manifest the wide door of you mercy by our witness of hospitality, compassion and justice;
we pray to you, O Lord—**

Grant safety to all who travel these coming days; and bless all families with hope, healing and joy; we pray to you, O Lord—

**Give wisdom to our students as they take exams during these days;
we pray to you, O Lord—**

Grant the joy of the Risen Christ to all who have died with hope, especially Ocie Pleasant; we pray to you, O Lord—

