

Today is Gaudete Sunday
That's why I have a rose colored chasuble on
It might look pink - some might call it pink, but it's not
Pink is not a liturgical color but rose is
That's a rose candle up there, not a pink candle
So kids, remember, when you go home and get to light the candles on the Advent wreath, don't ask if you can light the pink candle; ask if you can light the rose candle
Now those of you who lived in the era when everyone took Latin might remember what Gaudete means
Gaudete means "to rejoice"
Now to me, this seems odd
This is the third Sunday of Advent - it means we are half way through
I don't know about you, but I usually don't rejoice when I'm halfway done with anything
When I ran track in high school, one event I ran was the 3200, mostly because I was too slow to run anything else
The 3200 is 8 laps around the track - One time I'm almost positive the track official made me run 9 laps, but I'll get over someday
When I was running the 3200, it would probably be safe to say that when I had finished the fourth lap and had four to go, rejoice was most definitely not the feeling I had at that moment
Kids, when you are on a long trip and your parents tell you you are half-way there, do you rejoice - yeah probably not
You would think the Church would have Gaudete Sunday on the fourth Sunday of Advent - then Christmas would be less than a week away - or this year, exactly a week away - that would be something to rejoice about
For some reason the Pope didn't ask for my opinion on this, or anything else for that matter
Which is good - the Church is wise and let's just say patience is not one of my stronger virtues - I'm working on it - I have been known to say that the only thing I'm patient with is learning patience
I think the Church calls the third Sunday of Advent Gaudete Sunday to remind us that the journey is just as important as the arrival
Even though Christmas is still two week away, we are to rejoice
We have to remember that the Old Testament prophets spoke of Jesus coming hundreds of years before he actually came
In Isaiah, one of the prophets, we hear of hope
Hope that in the future the steppe will be full of flowers in bloom; that the glory of the Lord will be seen; that because of God's presence, there is no need to fear; the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the mute will speak
Isaiah says there will be much rejoicing and singing among those whom God has ransomed and saved
What we see foretold in Isaiah, we see that in Jesus they became a reality
John, the Baptist, wanted to see first hand that Jesus was the messiah, but he couldn't since he was in prison
So he sends a couple of his disciples

When they ask, Jesus shows them the signs that Isaiah talked about and then some: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them
Jesus then asks the crowds why they went out to the desert to see John before he was put in prison
Was it because he went with the times and said what people wanted to hear?
No, he was not like a reed swayed by the wind - instead he was a rock - solid, speaking the truth about the gravity of people's sins - so they went to see John because they recognized the truth of what he was saying
Did they go to see John because he wore fine clothing?
No - we know from the Gospel last weekend that John wore clothing made of camel's hair - believe me, that was not high fashion even in Jesus' time
Jesus said they went because he was a prophet - one who spoke the truth
But more importantly, John is the last of the prophets
All the prophets of the Old Testament, along with John pointed to Christ, to the coming of the Messiah, the one who would save the Jews and all of humanity and restore the relationship between God and His people lost with the sin of Adam and Eve
So this is what Jesus means when He says that among those born of women, there has been none greater than John the Baptist
And this was true up to the time of Jesus - John was in a certain way, the greatest human person who had ever lived - he more than anyone else before him pointed to the truth, especially Truth itself, Jesus Christ
However, that was only true up to that moment
Jesus then says that the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John
Because Jesus is God, anyone who follows Jesus is greater than John the Baptist
By our Baptism, we are a part of God family - Thus, we, especially here in the Mass, are getting a partial experience of the Kingdom of Heaven
We as Christians, as followers of Jesus, are greater than John the Baptist
This is reason enough to rejoice
The gift of our faith, the gift of being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, who is Truth itself, to be a Catholic, to be joined to Jesus body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist is most definitely reasons to rejoice
So in these final two weeks, there is a great need for patience - with each other - my favorite line from the second reading is "Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged" - with the busy-ness of the season we need to ask God for special graces for additional patience - but we also patience for the second coming and for seeing God face to face in the kingdom of heaven
But here, at the half way point, on Gaudete Sunday, there is a great need for rejoicing - rejoice that because of Jesus' first coming (which we will celebrate in two weeks) and our baptism, we are already partakers of the kingdom of heaven
Our faith, our Christianity, our Catholicism is a great gift from God - a gift given to us because God loves us more than we can fathom
So on this Gaudete Sunday, rejoice