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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
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The Second Sunday of Advent (A)

The opening prayer of today's Mass, which collects together our individual prayers and offers them to the Father, begs the Lord to "remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy." We see, then, that the faithful Christian receives Christ with a joyful heart.

My brothers and sisters, when was the last time you welcomed Christ Jesus into your heart with joy? As your head hit the pillow last night, did you joyfully recall his kindnesses throughout the day? Did you recall the sufferings he allowed to come your way with joy, grateful to be able to unite yourself to his Cross? Did you recall his mercy toward you as you awoke this morning, grateful for the gift of a new day, thus rising in joy?

My dear friends, if you live in this way the words of the Prophet Isaiah will be fulfilled for you:

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:2-3).

If you live your life in this way, ever grateful to the Lord for his infinite goodness, you will be found faithful at the coming

of our Lord Jesus Christ. You shall see "the joy that is coming to you from God" (Baruch 4:36).

If you have not recently welcomed the Lord with joy, when was the last time you did so? Some have greeted Christ with joy in life's happiest moments, while others have done so in the midst of life's sorrows and tragedies, both of which are necessary.

Did you receive the Lord joyfully when your children were born or when you wedded your spouse? Did you look to him with joy when you were promoted or moved into a new house, grateful for his manifest blessings? Did you look to him with joy at the death of a child or parent, grateful for the time you shared with them? Did you welcome Christ with joy at the loss of a job, grateful to live as he lived during his public ministry, dependent upon the generosity of others? Did you welcome Christ with joy in moments of depression or loneliness, grateful to share in his sufferings? Have you welcomed Christ with joy when his Gospel reached your hearts or when he came to you in the Sacraments?

Some will have come today to welcome Christ Jesus, our Eucharistic King, with great joy and others will have come simply to be here. Some are among us mindlessly while others are here with a great interior devotion. We are grateful for the presence of both. We are grateful for those who have come

in love for the example of faith, hope and love they give to us. We are grateful for those who are simply hear, that the Lord might open their hearts to his word.

Today we must hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah afresh: "Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide" (Isaiah 11:3). The fact that we have come today is not enough, it will not bring us to salvation. The Lord knows our thoughts and he knows whether or not we sincerely seek to follow him. It is upon this interior disposition that he will judge us, not on our external appearance.

John the Baptist, the last of the Prophets, condemns the Pharisees today for thinking they could come to salvation simply by coming to be baptized. The Pharisees believed they could enter the Kingdom of God simply by going through the motions of believers, by merely acting as people of faith. To them and to us, John directs his words:

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance... Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:7-10).

His words sting for we know them to be true.

Isaiah, too, directs a harsh warning to us: "He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4).

Who, then, are the ruthless and the wicked? They are those who live only for themselves, with no concern for the poor and the needy. They are those who ignore God's will for them and live their life autonomously and who seek the pleasures of this world above all else. They are those who lie to themselves and say, "I am not a sinner. I have not sinned. I am a good person. That's all God wants." They are those who never open their hearts to Christ in joy. These are the ruthless and the wicked whom the Lord will destroy with the breath of his lips.

Yet we are not without hope, for the John the Baptist proclaims there still is time to welcome the Lord Jesus, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). He reminds us, too, that if we are to welcome the Lord with joy, we must first ready ourselves to do so, saying: "Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight his paths" (Matthew 3:3).

For this reason Saint Paul calls the Lord "the God of endurance and encouragement" (Romans 15:5). The Lord does not desire that we be "cut down and thrown in the fire" but he will have it done if we do not avoid "the coming wrath" by seeking his mercy and preparing ourselves for his coming. It is his desire that we be ushered into his kingdom where "there shall be no harm or ruin on all [his] holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9).

To enter into his Kingdom we must open our hearts and ears "to hear his majestic voice" for when we do our "hearts will exult" (*Introit*, Second Sunday of Advent).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us beg the Lord to give us the grace to welcome Christ with joy so that we may "become one with him when he comes in glory" (*Collect*, Second Sunday of Advent). May he take us home to his Father's house, for his "dwelling shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). Amen.