

December 16, 2018 - Hope, Peace, Joy, Love!

The new Advent banners in our Church represent four candles marked: **Hope, Peace, Joy, Love**. We light the third candle of our Advent Wreath on this Third Sunday of Advent. This is the “rose” candle of Gaudete Sunday: the Sunday of Joy!

There is no doubt that if we had to choose one word to summarize the common theme of today’s readings, we will agree on Joy! The first reading selected from the short book of the Prophet Zephaniah is called “Psalms of Joy in Zion”: “**Shout for Joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart!** The Lord, your God is in your midst, a **mighty Savior: HE will rejoice** over you with **gladness... HE will sing joyfully** because of you.” (Zephaniah 3:14-18).

In the second reading, St. Paul writes to his fellow Philippians: “**Rejoice in the Lord always**, I shall say it again **Rejoice!** The Lord is near. **Have no anxiety at all!** The Peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7). The entire letter to the Philippian community is **the letter of joy**: Paul was very fond of the Philippian community as they demonstrated good behavior in following all his teachings on living a Christian life.

On the other hand, if we were asked to summarize with one word the readings of the other three Sundays of Advent, we may all come up with different answers. So why is the name for the first candle of our banners **Hope**? Why **Peace** for the second candle, and **Love** for the fourth one? I invite all of us to meditate on the meaning of our walking together the four weeks of Advent. I invite all of us to open our Bibles and go back to some of the readings of the last two Sundays, and also to turn to those of the forthcoming and last Sunday of Advent (December 23rd this year, just one day before Christmas Eve: Micah 5:1-4a, Hebrews: 10: 5-10, and Luke 1:39-45 when Mary visits Elizabeth). Note whenever a passage refers directly or indirectly to any of the four words, including **Joy**. I have just done this and expressions of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love can be found in every Advent Sunday. We should not be surprised as every Advent Sunday is to prepare us for the greatest event of all times: the first-ever coming of God on Earth as we celebrate at Christmas! Every time we reflect on the meaning of this first coming of Christ, we cannot be but filled with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Everything we have is a gift from God, and God’s **perfect gift** for each of us is that of His only Son: “God so **loved** the world that **He gave His only Son**, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have **Eternal Life.**” (John 3:16). To paraphrase St. Augustine’s saying “God became man so that man can become God”, Jesus, the Son of God, comes on earth to save all of us so that we can have Hope to be one day with God forever and ever. **Amen!** This is our **Hope!** This can explain why one could choose to first reflect on this message of **Hope** when we entered the Advent season two weeks ago. Someone could argue why not begin with a reflection of **faith**, which is the foundation of our Christian life? The counter-argument is that Faith cannot be sustained if we do not have **Hope**, and **Hope** in eternal life will strengthen our desire on earth to **Love God and our neighbor: God is Love!** When we love unconditionally, we are getting closer to **God**. So we can begin our Advent journey with **Hope** (the first candle), and end it with **Love** (the fourth and last candle) when preparing to **adore** in our hearts the child Jesus at Christmas!

Finally, **Peace and Joy** are the results of our Hope and Love; they are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Before going back to the Father, Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper “The Advocate, the **Holy Spirit** that the Father will send in my name— he will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I told you. **Peace** I leave with you; **My peace I give you**. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:26-27). Not surprisingly, Jesus is called **Prince of Peace** from the very moment of his birth. He is the only one who can give Peace. Without him, our hearts will remain troubled by all the desires and temptations of the world. Toward the end of Jesus’ Last Supper Discourse, we can hear one of the most memorable exhortations: “As the Father loves me, so **I also Love you. Remain in my Love**. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my Love... I have told you this so that **My Joy might be in you and your joy might be complete**. This is my commandment: **Love one another as I love you.**” (John 15:9-12).

As we continue our Advent Journey, preparing our hearts to welcome Jesus at Christmas, let us reflect on where we are on this Journey of **Hope-Peace-Joy-Love**. Do I hope in eternal life with God or do I lack trust in God’s love for me? Do I have **Peace** in my heart, the **Peace of Christ** or am I overwhelmed by the temptations of the world? Do I have Joy in my heart or does my heart feel troubled by daily anxieties? Do **I love God** above all and **love my neighbor** or am I consumed by the idols of this world: money, power, pleasure, prestige? Maybe for some of us, it is time to go back to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or to deepen our prayer life, or to begin to read the Scriptures regularly (e.g. Meditate on the readings of the coming Sunday). Maybe if I have never attended any of the **Novena** of Masses before Christmas, I may consider to come to one of them this week (they continue every day Monday-Friday at 7pm, and Saturday December 22 at 9am). Maybe I should reach out to someone that hurt me in the past, and tell them I have forgiven them... or say I am sorry to someone I have hurt... or help someone in need... or visit a friend or family member who is Homebound...

May we let the **Holy Spirit** guide our decisions in these final days of Advent so that we can have the best-ever **Christmas! Come Lord Jesus!** May your joy remain within my heart!

One in Christ,

Fr. Alain