

**Homily for the Mass of Gaudete Sunday  
During the Simbang Gabi Novena  
December 16, 2017**

**Saint Katherine Drexel Parish  
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, deacon, consecrated religious, members of the Filipino community in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here to celebrate this Mass of Gaudete Sunday in conjunction with the annual *Simbang Gabi* Novena.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”<sup>1</sup>*

These words, taken from sacred scripture, comprise the text of the *Introit* that we heard at the beginning of our Mass today and set the tone for what this day of rejoicing is truly about. Saint Paul knows, however, that it is not enough just to tell people to rejoice; he must also explain *why*. So he tells us why: *“The Lord is near.”*

During this Advent season, as the Church accompanies us towards Christmas, she helps us to rediscover the meaning of Christian joy. We must remember that, unlike the “joy” that is offered by the world, Christian joy is not rooted in the circumstances and struggles of our daily lives. Rather, it finds its root in the relationship we have in and through Jesus Christ. So, we rejoice on this Gaudete Sunday, because we know that the Lord is always near to us.

Throughout the liturgy of today’s Mass, we are reminded again and again of the necessity of rejoicing in the Lord. In our first reading, we hear the prophet Isaiah say, “*I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul.*”<sup>2</sup> The prophet also tells us why: “*for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation.*”<sup>3</sup> In the responsorial psalm, we recited the Cantic of Mary, also known as the *Magnificat*, where we hear Mary rejoicing in God her Savior. In our second reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the community in Thessalonica, the apostle instructs them to “*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*”<sup>4</sup> Even in our Gospel, we see John the Baptist offer us a model of rejoicing in the acceptance of who God made us to be.

But, as we take time to rejoice in the realization that our Lord is always near, let us also take stock of our Advent preparation for the coming of Christ. Have we taken the time during this Advent season to recognize the presence of our Lord around us, or have we gotten caught up in the commercialism of this pre-Christmas season? If we fall into the latter group and have not taken the time to make a straight way in our lives for the coming of Christ, let us renew our commitment to opening ourselves to receive the grace that God is offering us this Advent season, so that we might more perfectly come to know the joy of realizing the closeness of our Lord to each of us as our Divine Savior who redeems us from our sins.

One of the most popular songs for these final days of preparation for Christmas is the hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” The word ‘Emmanuel’, as you know, means “God is with us.” This is the great message of Christmas. It is not just a remembrance of a past event where God was with us when He was born and then for the next 33 years. Nor is it just our hopeful anticipation of His coming at the end of time. Christ is with us here and now, at all times and in every circumstance. Just before He ascended into Heaven, He made this promise: *behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*<sup>5</sup> God is faithful to His promises. We, in faith,

are called to trust those promises, especially when we do not understand or cannot see His presence in the midst of those difficult circumstances.

In this regard, let us turn to the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For when she found herself in the seemingly impossible situation of being the mother to the Son of God, she did not fall into doubt or despair, rather she opened herself to this great gift from God and was filled with the joy that comes from being close to Him. Following the example of Mary, when we find ourselves facing that which is seemingly impossible, let us too open ourselves to God's grace, trusting that God is indeed with us and that *with God all things are possible.*<sup>6</sup>

As we draw close to the celebration of the birth of Lord, let us be reminded that, by His entrance into the world, He has come to remain with us. His birth has brought a great light to *the people who walked in darkness.*<sup>7</sup> As we will hear in the Gospel on Christmas morning, that *light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*<sup>8</sup> No darkness will overcome the light of Christ dwelling among us. Christmas is a time for us to renew our faith in that promise and to remain steadfast in following that light which leads us to Him in Heaven.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, during these final days of Advent, may we open our hearts, so that we might be prepared to welcome Emmanuel, God with us, at this Mass, at Christmas, and every day of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 4:4-6

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 61:10

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 61:10

<sup>4</sup> Thessalonians 5:16-18

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:26

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 9:1

<sup>8</sup> John 1:5