

**Homily for the Closing Mass for Simbang Gabi/Filipino-American Novena
Third Sunday of Advent - *Gaudete Sunday* - Year C
December 15, 2024**

**Saint Joseph Church
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brother priests, beloved consecrated religious, and my lay brothers and sisters in Christ: it is *good* to be here to continue our Advent preparations with this final evening of our Simbang Gabi Novena. Simbang Gabi means “Night Mass” in Tagalog, the language of the Filipino people. This novena is a nine-day series of Masses intended to prepare for Christmas and to honor the Blessed Mother.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, which is traditionally given the title “*Gaudete*,” a Latin word which means “rejoice.” We wear rose colored vestments today, instead of the usual violet during the Advent season, as a sign that we should rejoice at the coming of Our Savior.

In the first reading from the prophet Zephaniah (*Zephaniah* 3:14-18), Zephaniah foresees a day of great rejoicing when people will rejoice with all their heart.

In our second reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians (*Philippians* 4:4-7), we are told, “Rejoice in the Lord always” because the “Lord is near.”

In today’s Gospel reading from Saint Luke (*Luke* 3:1-18), the crowds ask John the Baptist, “What shall we do?” His answers are straightforward: share with the poor, do not cheat people, do not steal, do not lie, and be satisfied with your wages. John the Baptist calls the people to change heart.

He tells them that they must put right their wrongs so that those who are sad through poverty, injustice or persecution may also be able to rejoice. It is this change of heart – the rectifying of wrongs, poverty, injustice, and persecution – that will enable all to rejoice, not just the rich and powerful, but also the poor, the deprived and the persecuted.

On this Gaudete Sunday, we are all called to renew this process which enables everyone to rejoice, to be joyous. Today we recall and renew this process of preparation and in so doing we are renewing our commitment to the Christian life, a life which calls us at times to make hard decisions, decisions which can be painful, but which lead to joy.

While it is generally understood that Advent is a season of preparation, many people would assume this preparation means preparing

for Christmas. The truth is that the focus on Jesus' birth becomes predominant only in the season's last nine days, starting tomorrow, December 16-24. That is when the Gospel readings specifically center on the historical birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The first part of Advent, however, is not focused on Jesus' first coming in Bethlehem, but on His second coming at the end of time. In that sense, it continues the focus on the end times that the Mass readings highlighted during the last weeks of Ordinary Time. The Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time and the First Sunday of Advent always have a judgment theme, either the Lord's return at the end of time, which we hear about at the end of Ordinary Time, or the need for watchfulness and sober readiness for that coming, which we read in the scriptures at the beginning of Advent. The Solemnity of Christ the King hinges them together, for Jesus is King of the Universe.

Thus, we need to be preparing not for a past event, but a future one. That is why, at every Mass, after the Our Father, the priest prays that the Lord will deliver us from every evil and keep us "free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

The fact that our society is so preoccupied with shopping for the best deals during the weeks before Christmas is an indication of a shallow and superficial understanding of the message of Christianity. The mystery of our salvation in Christ is so much more precious and profound.

The question we should be asking ourselves during this season of Advent preparation is not, “where can we buy what we want on sale,” but “what can we do to prepare ourselves to meet the Lord?” The answer is to be attentive to His presence, looking for Him where He is to be found. We begin with where we are now: Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst,” so He is among us whenever we gather in His name. Jesus is present in the proclamation of his word, which is why we stand for the Gospel, acknowledging the presence of the Risen Lord. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, a truth we learn from the accounts of the Last Supper and His teaching that we heard earlier this year in the readings from chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, where Jesus refers to Himself as the Bread of Life. We are attentive to Jesus present in those who are in desperate need, as Jesus taught that: “Insofar as you did this [i.e. offered help] to the least of my brothers, you did this to me.” Moreover, we are attentive to the presence of Jesus when we address Him and listen to Him in prayer.

Being attentive to the Lord, we will be prepared and able to stand with confidence before the Son of Man when He returns in glory – and when we are called from this life to the eternal life He has promised.

Throughout these final days before Christmas, therefore, let us remember that in our Christian lives this Advent, we are called to bring joy to those around us as we prepare for the endless joy that comes with eternal life in God's Kingdom.

Finally, this part of the church is called the sanctuary because a sanctuary is a place for that which is sacred, and Our Lord comes to us here at Mass and remains present in the tabernacle. As we go forth from here after receiving Holy Communion, we carry Christ with us in our hearts, so in a sense we all become a living sanctuary of Our Lord. May your hearts be the sanctuary where His love resides more fully, to the point of overflowing, so that through you, His merciful love will be made visible.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary

Pure and holy, tried and true

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living

Sanctuary for You.¹

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs, "Sanctuary" (Full Armor Publishing Company, 1982).