

► Sunday, December 14, 2008, Third Sunday of Advent

Is 61:1-2, 10-11; Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54; I Thes 5:16-24; Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Week #17: Main Theme: Our hunger for God is filled by his faithful and fruitful love, which gives us joy.

Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” means “Rejoice!” “I rejoice heartily in the Lord,” Isaiah tells us. “In my God is the joy of my soul.” Mary in today’s response is even more specific: she rejoices because of what God the Father has done for her and how He has “filled the hungry with good things”—with the very Word of God.

God cares for the poor, indeed. He calls us to feed the hungry, but there are other kinds of hunger and poverty than physical hunger and financial poverty. There is spiritual poverty, which shows itself in the hunger for God. The materially poor often feel this poverty of spirit more readily than those who are materially comfortable, as can be seen in the vigorous devotional life of simple believers as compared with the individualism of comfortable religion. Nevertheless, every single human being is hungry for God, even if he or she doesn’t realize it. We are made for love. In fact, we are made for a love of such endless dimensions that only God can satisfy this desire. As Saint Augustine so beautifully put it, “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” To be poor in spirit is essential to the Eucharistic advent attitude of Christian life, waiting for the Lord in watchfulness and in joyful gratitude for all the great goods God bestows on us. God wants to prepare our hearts for true love: to make a way in our hearts for His coming in fullness. He does this through the sacraments, through prayer, through Scripture, through the teaching authority of the Church. God wants to fill the hunger for Himself that He put in our hearts. He wants to fill us with His joy and to love us like a spouse in the great wedding-feast of the Lamb that will consummate all of history. In fact, this great feast of love already begins at each Eucharistic sacrifice. God wants to make us “like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels.” Today we rejoice in the faithful and life-giving love of God. May God prepare our hearts so that we can love as He loves! The Father gives us the Word made flesh in the Eucharist, by the power of their Holy Spirit of shared love, to satisfy our hearts hungry for love—so that we may live out faithful and fruitful love for others.

Bulletin: “Christ inscribed in the human body—in the body of every man and of every woman—a new dignity, because he himself has taken up the human body together with the soul into union with the person of the Son-Word. From this new dignity, through the ‘redemption of the body,’ a new obligation was born at the same time, about which Paul writes in a concise but very moving way: ‘You were bought at a great price’ (I Cor 6:20).”
Pope John Paul II, 2/11/1981