

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Cycle B December 14, 2008

**Readings: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28**

### Reflect the Light of Christ

This last week we have had two special celebrations of Mary, our Blessed Mother. On Monday we celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. In 1858, during one of her appearances to St. Bernadette, Mary identified herself by saying, ***“I am the Immaculate Conception.”*** When Bernadette told this to the priest, he knew Bernadette was telling the truth about the apparitions; she couldn’t have made this up. Though Mary’s appearances, the faithful witness of Bernadette, and the healings that occurred at Lourdes, many came to believe in Mary’s Son, Jesus.

And on Friday we had the celebration of our Lady of Guadalupe. And that celebration will be continued at the 12:30 Mass today followed by a dinner and a mariachi band. Mary appeared as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, and so our Hispanic community has a special devotion to this feast. But Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness of all the Americas, not just Mexico. We all need to keep a place in our hearts for this devotion. When Mary appeared to Juan Diego back in 1531, the bishop did not believe him and asked for a sign. And so on a cold December day, Mary instructed Juan to pick Castillian roses from the hilltop and place them in his cloak and take them to the bishop as a sign. You see, it was not the season for roses, and this particular type of rose was not native to the area. These two facts made the roses miraculous in themselves. But there was more. When Juan Diego opened his cloak, his tilma, for the bishop, the roses fell out. But on his cloak was the image of Our Lady, the image you see here on the actual size replica painting, and the bishop fell to his knees. The original cloak is still on display just outside Mexico City at the basilica almost 500 years later. It is made of a natural material that should have decayed within 10 or 20 years. And so the miracle continues. Through Mary’s appearance and Juan Diego’s faithful witness, hundreds of thousands of pagans were brought to Christianity. And because this conversion helped put an end to much of the human sacrifice that they had practiced, Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe is also referred to as the patroness of pro-life issues and of the unborn.

Mary provides us with light so we can more clearly see the straight paths that we are to follow, but she is not the light. Like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, Mary reflects the Light that is her Son. And in our gospel this morning we have John’s account of John the Baptist. John the Evangelist says of John the Baptist, ***“He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.”*** Those that are close to Jesus can reflect his light to others. Bernadette and Juan Diego reflected the light of Jesus that they received from Mary and many saw the straight path more clearly.

St. Paul said in our second reading this morning: ***“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”*** Our instructions then for today are simply to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. And our celebration of the Eucharist together is one of the ways we express our thankfulness; Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharistia* which means thanksgiving. We rejoice and give thanks that Jesus, the Light, has come into our world for our salvation.

This Third Sunday of Advent used to be called Gaudete Sunday; *gaudete* means rejoice in Latin. Because the focus is on rejoicing today, our third Advent Candle is pink, or rose. Some priests and deacons also wear pink vestments. I don't have a pink stole so my purple will have to suffice. Today we recognize all that God has done for us and there is no longer room for sadness to take root. We are at peace in Christ, and even great earthly sufferings cannot take away our joy. As we get closer to the end of Advent and our celebration of Christmas, it is a time for us to shift our focus a little bit from penance to rejoicing; from anticipating the second coming to anticipating the first.

And, of course, it is always a time for prayer; to pray unceasingly. The following are some words from John Paul II that he delivered in an audience to a group of young people back in 1979:

***“Prayer is in fact the recognition of our limitation and our dependence: we come from God, we belong to God and we return to God! We cannot, therefore, but abandon ourselves to him, our Creator and Lord, with full and complete confidence. ... Prayer, therefore, is first of all an act of intelligence, a feeling of humility and gratitude, an attitude of trust and abandonment to him who gave us life out of love. Prayer is a mysterious but real dialogue with God, a dialogue of confidence and love.***

***“... The Christian is a disciple of Jesus; he is one who really believes that Jesus is the Word Incarnate; the Son of God who came among us on this earth. As a man, the life of Jesus was a continual prayer, a continual act of worship and love of the Father, and since the maximum expression of prayer is sacrifice, the summit of Jesus' prayer is the Sacrifice of the Cross, anticipated with the Eucharist at the Last Supper and handed down with Holy Mass throughout the centuries. Therefore, the Christian knows that his prayer is Jesus; every prayer of his starts from Jesus; it is he who prays in us, with us, for us. All those who believe in God, pray; but the Christian prays in Jesus Christ: Christ is our prayer!”***

Thanksgiving, rejoicing, and prayer, our three themes for today, all go hand-in-hand. We are called to be people of thanksgiving and joy and prayer. And in that way we will grow in holiness, grow closer to God. And we will be better able to witness and reflect the Light of Christ to the world. We will be better able to lead others to see Christ's presence among us.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**