

BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
MEXICO CITY
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 16, 2001

Homily



he Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally called Gaudete Sunday, a Sunday of rejoicing because the Solemnity of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus for which we have been preparing is very near. The joy of today's celebration flows from the mystery of God's love for us, which led Him to send His own Divine Son in our human flesh to rescue us from sin and to win for us the victory over death, sin's principal effect. The words of the Prophet Isaiah express in anticipation the rejoicing at the coming of the Redeemer:

Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. (Reading I)

We know, in fact, the coming of God-made-man to save us at Christmas and His abiding presence with us in the Church. Our rejoicing today should characterize every day of our life because of Christ's presence with us in the Church. For us, the prophecy of John the Baptist has been fulfilled: Jesus Christ is "the one who is to come." (Gospel)

II. Our rejoicing pertains also to our expectation of Christ's Final Coming at the end of time. We await the glorious return of Christ with patience, joyfully confident that Our Lord will come and bring to final fruition our loving service of Him and His Church. (Reading II) Like the prophets, each day of our life is to be an anticipation of the Final Day. Therefore, our mind and heart must be steadfastly directed to Our Lord and His Final Coming.

III. For us, the rejoicing of Gaudete Sunday has a special depth, for we have encountered Christ on our pilgrimage through Our Lady of Guadalupe, His mother and His herald, and through the monument to His universal kingship. The strong graces of our pilgrimage have led us to an ever deeper loyalty to Christ the King, to His fuller reign in our lives. We have come to know our own frailty and the aspects of our lives from which we have kept Christ's gentle reign of self-sacrificing love.

Through the encounter with Our Lady of Guadalupe, which we have had and which we are having this morning, as we celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice under her maternal gaze, the inexhaustible richness of God's mercy has been shown to us, as it was first shown to Blessed Juan Diego, Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, Juan Bernardino, and the countless native Americans who asked for Baptism because of the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. To pilgrims down the over 470 years since the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the sacred place in which the miraculous tilma of Blessed Juan Diego has been exposed, Our Lady of Guadalupe has shown and manifested God's infinite mercy.

IV. Our rejoicing today pertains also to our mission of new evangelization. While our reflection on the darkness which envelopes our culture could lead us to discouragement and even to the abandonment of our mission, our confidence in Christ and His Church leads us to overcome our doubts and fears, and to place all our trust in Christ.

In his *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in America,"* our Holy Father offers us reassuring words about our vocation and mission in the Church:

With the command to evangelize which the Risen Lord left to his Church there goes the certitude, founded on his promise, that he continues to live and work among us: "I am with you always, to the close of the ages." (*Mt.* 28, 21). The mysterious presence of Christ in his Church is the sure guarantee that the Church will succeed in accomplishing the task entrusted to her. At the same time, this presence enables us to encounter him, as the Son sent by the Father, as the Lord of Life who gives us his Spirit. A fresh encounter with Jesus Christ will make all members of the Church in America aware that they are called to continue the Redeemer's mission in their lands. (No. 7a 8)

Our "fresh encounter" with Jesus Christ, through the mediation of Our Lady of Guadalupe, during these days, has certainly made us aware that we are called "to continue the Redeemer's mission" in the United States of America.

The mission is not our own. It is not of our invention and ingenuity. Rather, we receive the mission from Christ, and, through His Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we carry out the mission on behalf of others. Through prayer, and most perfectly through the Holy Eucharist which we are now celebrating, we draw near to Christ—and in the Eucharist we receive the Body and Blood of Christ—who nourishes the life of this Holy Spirit within us so that we can bring His light to the world. Our brothers and sisters who see the light of Christ in us will be drawn to Christ, the true source of our mission. They will see Christ within us through our personal conversion, our communion with God and our neighbor, and our solidarity with our neighbor, especially those who are in most need.

V. We have traveled here on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe to be renewed in our vocation and mission. We have left our familiar surroundings to travel to a holy place, a place made holy by the appearance of the Mother of God to Blessed Juan Diego, our brother in the human family and in the Roman Catholic faith, a place made holy by the manifestation of the goodness and mercy of God toward all His children in the appearances and words of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe given through Blessed Juan Diego to all of America. We have received special grace at the holy places which we have visited in these days. There has been special grace for us in the journey itself to holy places in search of Jesus Christ, in search of renewed light for our lives, so that we may carry out the mission of the Redeemer in the world. We have come here for a privileged meeting with Christ, so that we may live more fully in Him in our daily lives through our personal conversion, our communion with God and with our neighbor, and our solidarity with our neighbor, especially the neighbor in most need. We have come here to be inspired and strengthened for the mission of the new evangelization, teaching and living the Catholic faith as if for the first time, with the enthusiasm and energy of the first disciples and of the first missionaries to our continent.

VI. As we now meet Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we are united to Him in the mystery of His Passion, Death and Resurrection, the mystery of pouring forth our life in love of God and of our neighbor and thereby saving our life unto eternity. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, who has led us here to show us her Son, help us by her love and prayers to submit our lives completely to the gentle reign of Christ the King. As we bring our pilgrimage to a conclusion, let us cry out with joyful confidence the words of Blessed Father Miguel Pro: *Viva Christo Rey! Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!*

Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.

Blessed Juan Diego, pray for us.

