

Fr. Larry Richards
Sunday, December 17, 2006
Third Sunday of Advent

Good morning! Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means “let us rejoice!” And the way we rejoice is that we have to sit there and listen to the gospel today, and we will get to the other two readings in a moment. But in the gospel, the first thing that five different groups asked John the Baptist was something very practical – “what should we do?” Tell me what to do and I’ll do it, huh? And to do that takes a great act of humility! Because, again, most people come in and instead of coming before God, they like to tell God what to do, instead of the other way around! This week, we had a priest that came in from New Zealand, he was studying in Steubenville, and wanted to find out about how to have a parish with evangelization in it, so he called and said, “Father, can I come up and meet you?” because he is going to be head of evangelization in his diocese in New Zealand. And so I said sure, come on up! And here is a priest ordained about 10 years, very good, good, holy man – gave me some great ideas about what we were going to be doing. And, anyway, he looked right at me and said “Father, tell me what I shall do and I will do it...” and I said “boy, if I had parishioners like this, I would be ecstatic!!!” Oh, my gosh, please!!! But anyway, here is this priest and he is asking “what should I do? Tell me Father, I will do it!” And I said, “if you are not doing a holy hour, you need to do one every day of your life!” And he said “ok, Father...” and when he left, he came and gave me a hug and said, “ok, Father, every day for the rest of my life, I will always do a holy hour...” And I thought, ok here is a man that will sit there in humility and ask somebody else how do I get holier? Tell me what to do! I’ll do it! And that is what they are all doing today in front of John the Baptist – “here I am a soldier – how can I follow God as a soldier?” “Here I am – a tax collector – how can I follow God as a tax collector?” And so all of us can come before God – and that is what we must do in our daily prayer! “God – what should I do?” And again, if you and I come before God every day, with a listening heart then God will tell you what to do! But again, most people, even in their prayer – and I think we’ve hinted to this so many times this last year “God, this is what I want you to do” instead of “God, tell me what to do.” And see, when we do this, we flip everything around. We say “ok God, this is what I am going to do and this is what I want you to do for me.” And this is what our prayer becomes is manipulation, trying to get the God of the universe to do what I want. But today, we are told about what we are called to do! We need to come before God and say “what do you want me to do?” And then, He will tell you. And a good way to do that, of course is when you are silent in prayer. Another good way to do that is when you are reading the word of God. The word of God will tell you what to do. If you sit there and wonder, ask the word of God. The word of God is right there – it will tell you what to do! The Catechism will teach you what to do! You know, “what am I supposed to do with my sexual life with my wife...?” Well, go ask the church – the church will tell you what to do! “Well, I’m really not interested Father, to tell you the truth!” That is the problem! We come before God on our terms, instead of coming before God on His terms. “You tell me what you want me to do...”

Now, another good thing to do is get a spiritual director. To get a spiritual director is to get someone that you put yourself in complete obedience to. And so, when you do that, what ever they tell you – that is what you must do! Again, my spiritual director forever, Fr. Pete – you know, and he drives me nuts sometimes, because he tells me what to do! And I have to do it! If I wouldn't have done what he wanted – you know years ago, after the first Gulf war, and I went and called the Bishop and I said "Bishop, I want to go in the Marines and be a Marine Chaplin..." and he said "ok, Larry, you can go and be a Marine Chaplin." Thank you! And so, I'm going to go and be a Marine Chaplin and all of a sudden I'm thinking, "Oh I didn't talk to Pete about this, I better go talk to Pete!" And so, I called him and said "hey, we have to get together..." and he said "ok" and so I went and saw him and I said, "oh, by the way, Pete, I'm going in the Marines, I'm going to be a Chaplin in the Marines." "Absolutely not!" "Huh?" "Absolutely not! That is not God's will for you!" "Well, Pete, I already asked the Bishop, and the Bishop said ok!" "I don't care what you did – I'm your spiritual director!" And I said "what do you want me to do?" He said "you call the Bishop and tell him your spiritual director said no!" So, I called the Bishop and said "Bishop..." "Yes, Larry..." "Pete said no!" "Ok!" And hung up, and that was it! But again – my will was that I was going to be a Chaplin in the Marines – that was what I was going to do! If I would have done that – I'd have never become pastor, I'd have never started the Foundation, I never would have gone around speaking the way I do – NONE of that would have ever happened if I had done my will instead of God's will! And so, what must happen is in our life we need to come before God and say "what do you want me to do..." and then do it! And then, His plan will be real in our life!! If not, we are just going to go through our stuff and say "oh, my life stinks, why is all this happening and why isn't everything falling into place for me?" Hmmm. Because we try to tell God what to do! First thing. Then, on this Gaudete Sunday, what needs to happen is we need to go beyond just sitting there saying – wanting us to rejoice, right? It says "rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again – rejoice!" That is in the second reading. But before we get there – why should I rejoice – let's go to the first reading! And this first reading is a phenomenal reading – I don't know if you get it, because sometimes when things talk about the Old Testament, we go into "la la land" and we don't pay any attention! But, here in this first reading is a beautiful last couple of lines – it says "fear not, oh Zion, be not discouraged, the Lord your God is in your midst – a mighty Savior." So, the Lord our God is in our midst – right there in the tabernacle, and He is a mighty savior! But this is what gets me ecstatic today! "He will rejoice over you with gladness, and He will renew you with His love. He will sing joyfully because of you as one sings at festivals!" Now, I don't know how you are when you think about what God thinks of you – you know this last week, I spent five hours in the airport waiting to get home – and drove to Columbus and back – 7,800 miles I put on my car in the last four and a half weeks. And in all of this time sitting in the car, there is a lot of time for praying. And as I was praying I just said "Lord, I just can't believe you are an ogre...I just can't believe that the way sometimes we are, and me especially - you know, I gotta do this, and I gotta do that, or God's gonna be mad – I just don't believe it when it comes down to it, in myself sometimes! I just don't get it!" That the God of the universe wouldn't create us all and say "hey, nine tenths of you are all going to hell forever, you

know! Sorry! I just knew when I created you... you were going to hell!” That is not the God of the Universe that I follow, because if it is the God of the Universe, I’m out of here! I don’t want to be with Him for ten minutes – let alone eternity! If that is the God of the Universe, I’m out of here! I’m going to the Bahamas tomorrow – have a nice Christmas!! But that is not the God of the Universe! This is the God of the Universe who says to you and me “I rejoice over you!” My image of God when I think about Him thinking of me is He cries over me! “Did you have to say that again, Larry? Did you have to make that comment Larry?” Or He is mad at me – “Larry, you should have done that and you didn’t...” “I know!” So this is my image of God in my own mindset. And here God is telling us “would you stop that...? I don’t know where you got that image, but this is what I say today...I rejoice over you! I sing joyfully because of you!” Do you get that? That when you and I have a heart that only wants to do God’s will, in spite of weakness, in spite of our sinfulness. When we have a heart that says “Lord, I only want to do your will – I am sorry that I don’t do it all the time, but that is what I want Lord!” Then He looks at me and He looks at you and He rejoices over you and over me. And if God will rejoice over us in spite of our weaknesses, then we can say with St. Paul “rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again, rejoice!” We can rejoice, because God rejoices over us! So, what we need to do today to get into this mindset is we need to be people who come before God and say “what do you want me to do?” We have to have that heart that seeks to please Him! That seeks to do God’s will instead of ours! And then, when we do that, then God rejoices over us in spite of our weakness, and when we know that God rejoices over us, then we can rejoice in Him. Got it? Get it? Gonna do it? Good! May each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen.