



## **3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT YEAR B – “GAUDETE SUNDAY”**

Advent is the time we use to prepare ourselves to celebrate the birthday of Jesus once again. But it is also a time to prepare for his coming to us sacramentally at each Mass, his coming to us individually at the end of our lives, and his coming to us collectively at the end of time.

Suppose we were told that the Christ whom we are waiting for is already here in our midst as one of us. Would that make a difference in our lives? There is a story told about a monastery that was going through an identity crisis. Some of the monks left; no new candidates joined them, and people were no longer coming for prayer and consultation as they once did.

The few monks that remained were becoming old and depressed and bitter in their relationship with one another. The abbot heard about a holy man, a hermit living alone in the woods and decided to ask him for help. He told the hermit how the monastery had dwindled and diminished and now looked like a skeleton of what it used to be. Only seven old monks remained. They were old and crotchety and couldn't stand each other.

The hermit told the abbot that he had a secret for him. He said, “One of the monks now living in the monastery is actually the Messiah, but he is living in such a way that no one can recognize him.” With this revelation the abbot went back to his monastery, summoned a community meeting and recounted what the holy hermit told him. The aging monks looked at each other in disbelief, trying to discern who among them could possibly be the Christ.

Could it be Brother Mark who prays all the time? But he has this holier-than-thou attitude toward others. Could it be Brother Joseph who is always ready to help? But he is always eating and drinking and cannot fast. Could it be Brother Francis who writes such beautiful meditations? But he doesn't practice what he preaches.

At the end of the meeting what each one of the monks knew for sure was that any of the monks could be the Christ, except himself. From that day on, the monks began to treat one another with greater respect and humility, knowing that the person they were speaking to could be the Christ.

They began to show more love for one another, their common life became more brotherly and their common prayer more fervent. Slowly people began to take notice of the new spirit in the monastery and began coming back for retreats and spiritual direction. Word began to spread and, before you knew it, candidates began to show up and the monastery began to grow again as the monks grew in zeal and holiness. All this because a man of God drew their attention to the truth that Jesus was living in their midst as one of them.

In today's gospel John the Baptist announces that same powerful message to the Jews of his time. He tells them: “Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal” (John 1:26-27). John was obviously talking about Jesus who was in their midst at that time. But some folks did not recognize him.

Jesus is also in our midst now. Do you recognize him? Advent is the time when we prepare ourselves to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. He was born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. He can be born again in each one of us if we do not abort him. Jesus now lives in you (Galatians 2:20).

