Today is Gaudete Sunday! Advent.YrA.3Sun. 12/11/2022

So "Rejoice" everyone……
because that is what Gaudete literally means. "Rejoice!"
The Advent season is shifting its focus:
At the Masses of the first and second weeks of Advent
we heard in the Gospel Readings, "The Lord is coming."
Starting today the focus during Advent will be "The Lord is near."
Even the color of purple…which symbolizes Penance…shifts to Joy…to rose.
Let me review the Gospels of Advent
and maybe it will come into focus for you.

2 weeks ago, Matthew painted a picture of two women grinding at a mill……
one was taken and one was left.
Matthew's message is…"You must be prepared
for at an hour you do not expect the Son of Man will come."
Last Sunday the Gospel introduced John the Baptist.
He is the voice of one crying in the desert.
"Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight his paths."
Those Gospels are getting us to think that someone great is coming……
So……Straighten up! Repent! Focus! Be ready!

Today in the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist is in prison
because of his defiance to King Herod.
John hears of the works of Christ.
He recognizes that Jesus must be near.
John sends his followers to Jesus to ask a direct question……
"Are you the one or shall we look for another?"
Jesus answers John the same way he answers us today.

Figure it out for yourself!

Jesus did not say those exact words

but we get the gist of what he is saying.

Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus answers…

"You will see in me the Glory of our Lord……the splendor of our God.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened.

The ears of the deaf be cleared.

The lame leap like a stag and the mute will sing."

Jesus is performing these miracles

not in private but in public for all to see so…

the answer to John's question, "Who are you?" is obvious.

All you need to do is look around and see what is happening

and you will know that "I am the anointed one, the one you are waiting for."

What about our lives today?

Are we, like John the Baptist, looking around for the miracles of Jesus' love?

Are we recognizing that Jesus is coming?

Do we know and accept Jesus' love in our hearts?

Jesus is near……that is how we can have that personal relationship with him.

Jesus is always here with us.

He is with us in our thoughts…our prayers…and in the people around us.

We don't need miracles to believe……we need faith.

Faith is what builds us as a community of believers in Christ Jesus.

Let me explain a symbol of my faith in Jesus Christ…

one that is right now…being built in this church…

and you saw it as you entered.

You passed the Baby Jesus' crèche, the crib, at the entrance of the church.

In the 1st week of Advent it was empty.

In the 2nd week the crèche had animals, sheep & cattle.

This week the shepherds are added…

and next week Mary and Joseph will appear.

And then on Christmas Day, the Baby Jesus will appear.

The crib will be fully built on January 8

at the Epiphany of the Lord when 3 wisemen are added.

What does this crèche mean in your life?

When I saw the crib in our gathering space this year

I immediately got excited.

In past years we have had either

pine boughs or straw lining the manger scene.

This year however I saw wheat stalks.

Think about it…wheat.

What is wheat a symbol of? Life…Eternal Life.

I didn't see just straw. I saw Life.

Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life.

Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life."

The town of Bethlehem in Hebrew means…House of Bread.

Jesus was laid in a feeding trough.

All of humanity feeds on Jesus' words.

I was thoroughly impressed by this year's crib.

However, in my enthusiasm and YELLING about seeing life instead of straw or wheat,

I was told by our staff, "Hey, we just used some old fall decorations."

Oh! I could feel the air coming out of my balloon.

They just didn't see the wonder…I saw it so differently.

Let's go back to the Gospel.

John the Baptist is put in prison.

In his mind the Savior of the World

will come with a sword that will smite the Romans.

Chaff will be burned in unquenchable fire.

The brood of vipers that were the Pharisees & Sadducees

will be put in their place.

John perceived a different Jesus…like I saw a different straw.

Jesus asked the crowds how they saw John.

Is he someone in royal purple?

Or a man dressed in camel hair cloth eating locust and honey?

So Jesus asks us today, "Do you see straw or do you see life?

Today the lesson in the Gospel is asking all of us…how we see Jesus?

Is Jesus power and might…or is he a healer?

Is Jesus feeding us

or letting us flounder around like a ship without a rudder?

Look around you.

We have the very Words of Jesus in these Gospels.

We have Eucharist…the Body, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus to feed us.

Look around.

Not only is Jesus near……

Jesus is here!