

**Gaudete Sunday (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent)**  
**Homily – St. Benedict’s Parish**  
**12/13 December 2009**

I love John the Baptist!

Sometimes I sound like him  
and when I let my hair grow wild and my beard get scruffy, I think I look like him,  
especially when I wear my camel’s hair robe around the house.

I love John the Baptist because he points the way to Jesus.<sup>1</sup> We all love him for that.

At every Mass we sing his words in the “Lamb of God” and then Father (N.) quotes John the Baptist directly:  
“Behold, this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

We sing John’s words at every Mass. John points out Jesus before we receive Him in Communion.

Of course John seldom gets credit for his words and we should not be surprised by this.

St. Augustine pointed out that  
    John, the Baptist, is the voice,  
    Christ, the LORD, is the Word.<sup>3</sup>

The voice lasts for a time, but the Word was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever!<sup>4</sup>  
What Good News!<sup>5</sup> It makes me feel like singing!

We should rejoice today – the midpoint of Advent – because  
    Christ has come into our world,  
    Christ will come in glory, and  
    Christ comes into our hearts today if we are open to Him.<sup>6</sup>

We should rejoice today not only because Christmas is coming because Easter *has already happened!*  
We know how the story ends!

In fact, if you or I were alive two thousand years ago, I doubt we would have made much over Jesus’ birth.  
It’s because we know that he suffered, died and rose for us that we can rejoice today. We know what became of  
the Child of Bethlehem. We Christians rejoice because we see everything through the lens of Easter!  
That is truly the Good News! So we sing our joy today!

---

<sup>1</sup> Mathias Grünewald’s “Isenheim Altarpiece” (1512-1515) was in mind for its connection of John the Baptist (its inside center panel) and Christ’s Resurrection (its outside panel). John the Baptist’s distinctive “pointing” and Grünewald’s use of John 3:30 struck me -- *Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui* (He must increase, I must decrease).

<sup>2</sup> I have noticed that the parishioners have been singing the Lamb of God exceptionally well the past few weeks.

<sup>3</sup> Based on St. Augustine’s *Sermo 293*, 3: PL 1328-1329. Office of Readings for the Third Sunday of Advent

<sup>4</sup> See John chapter 1:1-18; Gospel reading for Christmas Mass during the Day; referencing John the Baptist’s testimony.

<sup>5</sup> Ending of today’s Gospel pericope – Luke 3:18.

<sup>6</sup> Based on St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermo 5, In Adventu Domini*, 1-3: *Opera omnia*, Edit. Cisterc. 4, 188-190.. Office of Readings for Wednesday of the First Week of Advent.

We should rejoice today because John the Baptist was a practical prophet.  
It's funny how so many people think that prophets are just dreamers;  
Really, they are the most practical people imaginable. They know what it takes to build a church!<sup>7</sup>

Note how practical John is in today's Gospel.  
The crowd asks him "what should we do?"  
the tax collectors ask "we should we do?"  
and soldiers ask "what should we do?"  
and he gives them all practical answers!

When the crowd asks "what should we do?" John answers – give to the poor.  
When the tax collectors ask "what should we do" to get ready" John answers – don't cheat people.  
When the soldiers ask "what should we do" to get ready? John answers – don't threaten people and be happy with your pay.<sup>8</sup>

If I'm John, I can hear you, St. Benedict's, asking the same question today "what should we do" to get ready?

Here's the practical answer:  
I'd like you to buy an additional gift for all the young people on your Christmas list.

Don't replace a gift- give them something more.  
Make it a religious gift – a crucifix, rosary, icon, statue of Mary, a medal...  
something that has meaning for you.

Don't just give the gift though...  
*Enclose a hand-written note with it.*  
*Tell them how much you love them and how important your faith is to you.*

In July, I guarantee that the gift that mattered will be the one with your note.  
Your note will be passed around for years, even decades...it will become family scripture.  
Grandma and grandpas' notes especially! Family treasures!

That's how you share the Good News!  
That's how you balance humanity and divinity<sup>9</sup>, earthly and heavenly gifts.<sup>10</sup>  
Get ready to own Christmas this year.

So,  
Rejoice!  
Because THIS Church is where Christ's-Mass is celebrated.<sup>11</sup> You already own Christmas. Rejoice!

---

<sup>7</sup> Referencing the motif from my previous homily on Christ the King Sunday 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 3:10-14

<sup>9</sup> Referencing the hypostatic union

<sup>10</sup> The Incarnate Word is the perfect gift.

<sup>11</sup> Listening to parishioners lately, especially at a recent Faith Sharing Group meeting (11 Dec. 2009), there is fear over "losing" Christmas to the secular crowd. I wanted to give confidence that there is nothing to fear from the world's hollow claims of Christmas. Properly understood, it is ours by definition!

Rejoice Church!

Because Zephaniah said so<sup>12</sup>  
And Isaiah<sup>13</sup>  
And St. Paul (to his beloved Philippians)<sup>14</sup>  
And Fr. (N.) said so  
And your poor deacon too.

Again I say Rejoice, Church!

Because some people cannot. You can. Who are you not to rejoice when you can?!

Rejoice!

Because Elizabeth did!<sup>15</sup>  
And Mary Did!<sup>16</sup>  
And your grandma did even when her sorrows were far deeper than yours! Rejoice!

Rejoice!

Because Benedict did! Aquinas did! and your granddad did!

Rejoice because

Your Lord is at hand  
Your Savior dawns  
Your Christ is here now  
Your Jesus already suffered, died and rose for you and me!

Rejoice because “we are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!”<sup>17</sup>

[sung]

*Rejoice heavenly Powers! Sing choirs of angels! Exult all creation around God throne!  
Jesus Christ the King is Risen.  
Sound the trumpet of salvation!*

*Rejoice O earth in shining splendor!  
Radiant in the brightness of your King.  
Christ has conquered, glory fills you!  
Darkness vanishes forever!*

*Rejoice O Mother Church!  
Exult in glory!  
The Risen Savior shines upon you!*

[spoken deliberately]

**Let this place resound with joy!**<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Zephaniah 3:14-18a; today's First Reading.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 12:2-6; today's Responsorial Canticle. One of the rare liturgical celebrations when a canticle replaces the Psalm.

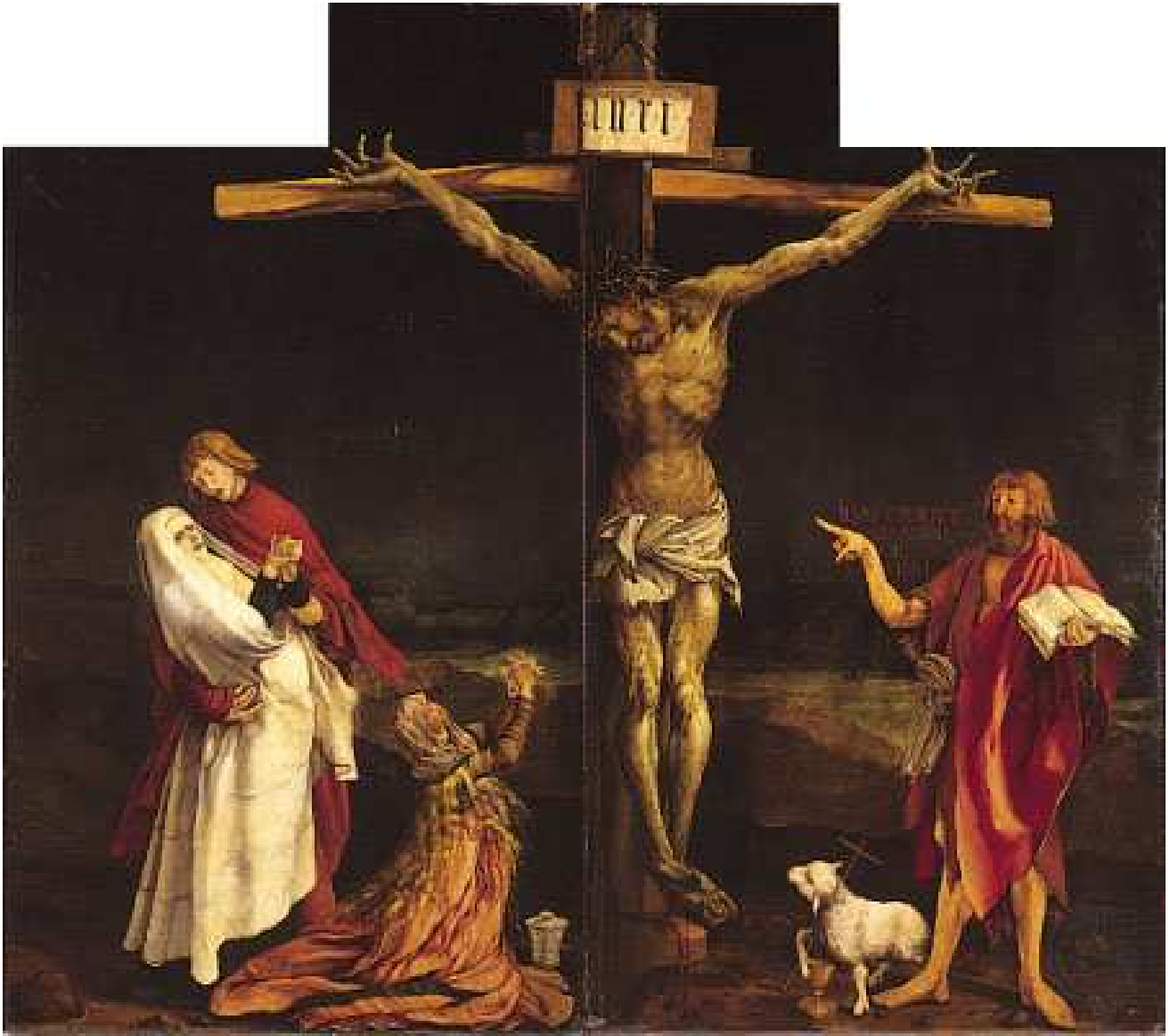
<sup>14</sup> Philippians 4:4-7; today's Second Reading

<sup>15</sup> See Luke 1:44. She was full of joy, since John leaped for joy in her womb!

<sup>16</sup> See Luke 1:47 “My spirit rejoices in God my savior.”

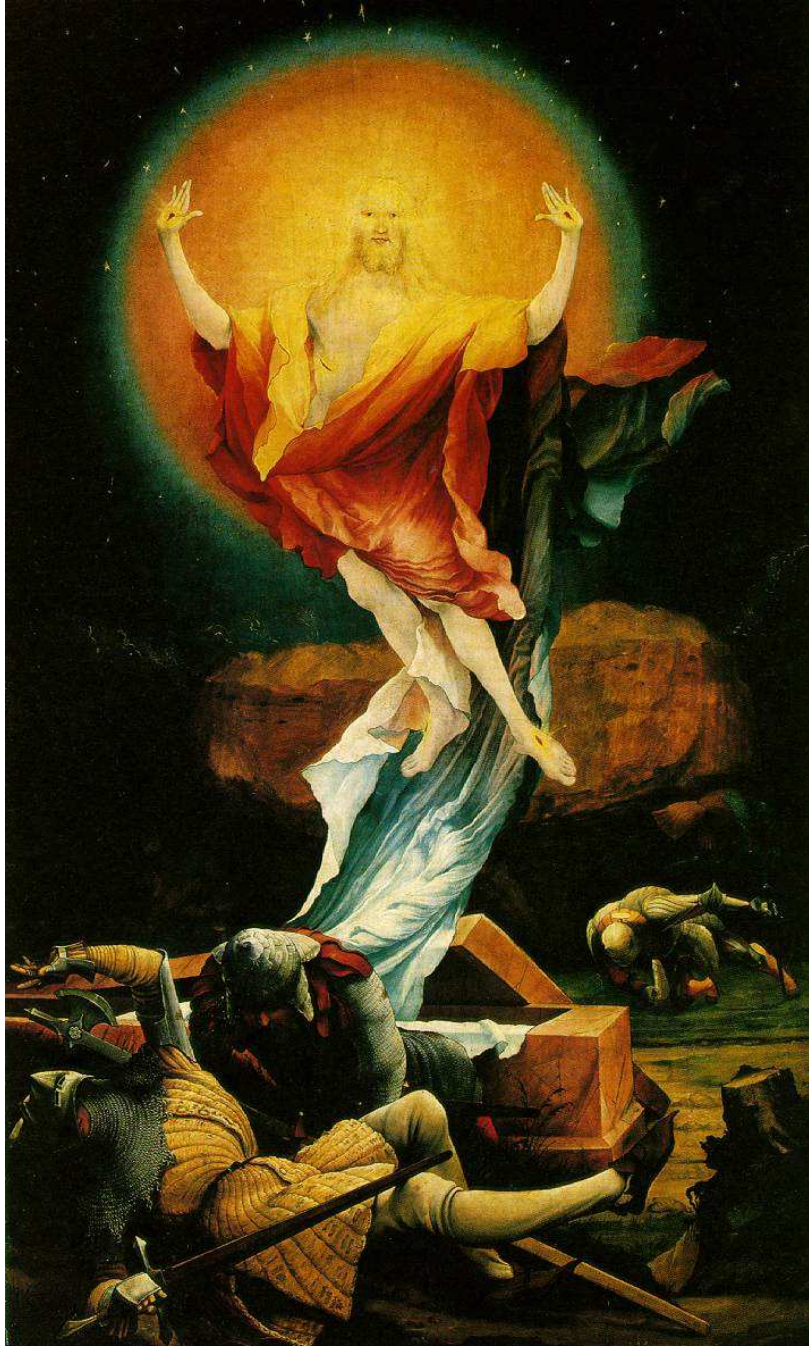
<sup>17</sup> Attributed to St. Augustine, see his Expositions on the Easter Alleluia and Psalm 148.

<sup>18</sup> Exsultet, 5-7<sup>th</sup> century.



*Isenheim Altarpiece* inside center panel

---



*Isenheim Altarpiece* closed panel