

Gaudete Sunday
December 11, 2016

Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete means “rejoice!” We wear rose vestments to get a break from Advent’s purple, the first reading speaks of new life blossoming forth, St. James exhorts patience, and John the Baptist, about to die in prison, sees God’s promise to Israel fulfilled. These are all causes for rejoicing and I will return to them in a moment.

Today, many of you will join me in being sad. A homily is not normally the time to share shocking news, but unfortunately today is an exception. We Dominican friars will be leaving St. Mary Magdalen’s this summer and will return the responsibility for providing your priests to the Diocese of Oakland. There is a letter from our Provincial Council in bulletin. Many of you pick up and glance at the bulletin before Mass starts. That is why they are not out today; I wanted you to hear this news from me. The painful decision to withdrawn from St. Mary Magdalen and two other ministries was not made lightly or suddenly, as the letter explains. Please take the time to read it. It did not reproduce well, so it is a little difficult to read and I apologize.

With the prophet Isaiah, I tell you: Be strong, fear not! Even midst of this or any difficulty, God remains faithful. God gives us divine recompense. To recompense someone is to make amends for loss or harm suffered. God did so to Israel after wandering in the desert for 40 years by giving them their own land. The Father recompensed Jesus by raising him to new and everlasting life after his Passion and Death. God also vindicates, which means to show that something was correct and justified. In our case, like Israel, what God vindicates is faith. “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be

cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.” This is what John the Baptist, the Blessed Mother and the Apostles all saw take place in Jesus.

No doubt in the coming weeks and months after the shock died down, all of us will experience the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I have known of the decision for a week. Honestly for me, what I have felt this week is mostly depression. The sadness of knowing that I was going to have to break this news to you today weighed down my heart. I have experienced some anger too as I asked: Why me? Why do I have to do this? This isn't what I signed up for when I came here! Like me, each of you will have your own response; let us allow one another to experience whatever the one next to us is experiencing right now. This is the best gift we can give one another at this moment.

Advent is a strange season: we both look back in history to the Incarnation and the Lord's First Coming and we look ahead to the end of time to the Lord's Second Coming in glory. The constant theme is hope. In these last months in my tenure as pastor here, I hope it will be like the season of Advent for us. I hope we can reflect on all good that has happened over the last 93 years, that we can see and appreciate all the ways thousands and generations of people have encountered Jesus in this community and were strengthened to live as His disciples. Nothing can take away the beautiful and fond memories you have of Fr. David Farrugia or Fr. Vicente or the many other Dominican who have touched your lives. We will all take those ties into eternal life with us. We will remember how good God as been to us.

I also hope that in these coming months we will look in hope to the future. St. Paul reminds us that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what God has in store for those who

love Him. After we recall our past, we can look confidently toward the future and begin to chart the course you will take in this next stage in your life. I promise you that I will do all that I can, for as long as I'm here, to celebrate and to plan.

St. Mary Magdalen and Blessed Mother Mary have always been this community's constant companions on the journey and they will continue to be so. Both stood in sadness and grief at the foot of Jesus' cross as he died and both witnessed to Jesus' new and everlasting life in the Resurrection. Both knew the deepest sadness and the greatest joy. May these two holy and faithful women be with each of us and all of us in these days ahead, comforting us in our sorrow and gently pointing us and accompanying us to embrace the vision that God has for us: "The desert and the parched land will exult; / the steppe will rejoice and bloom. / They will bloom with abundant flowers, / rejoice with joyful song... / they will.