



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss  
Bishop of Rapid City**

**Homily for the Third Sunday of Advent  
Opening of the Holy Door for the Year of Mercy  
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

December 13, 2015

My friends, the *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* is here. We have opened the Holy Door here this morning and I will open the Holy Door at St. Charles Borromeo Church in St. Francis on the Rosebud Reservation next Sunday. As Pope Francis shared, “*To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them. This will be a year in which we grow ever more convinced of God’s mercy*<sup>1</sup>.”

It is my hope and prayer that whoever walks through this Door of Mercy, the floodgates of God’s mercy will be poured upon them.

To open this Holy Door on Gaudete Sunday speaks to what lies ahead for us. *Gaudete* is a Latin word derived from the word *gaudere*, meaning *to rejoice, to feel joy, or to be glad*. St. Paul exhorts us, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice. Indeed the Lord is near.”

The Prophet Zephaniah exclaims: “The Lord God is in your midst; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love.”

In other words, The Lord God is in our midst to renew us in his mercy. This is something for which we should REJOICE.

In these last two weeks of Advent, the great precursor of Jesus, John the Baptist, has come on the scene. He speaks of a tremendous gift which is coming to the Israelite people. John speaks about one who is mightier than he who is coming to bring something far more that John himself could ever bring.

In a sense, John the Baptist came *to announce a year of favor as well, a year of vindication by God – An Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*. He came proclaiming Jesus, who is the face of the Father’s mercy.

The people in darkness, the people in exile, will experience great joy because God will come and once again be in their midst; his presence would be a joy that would transform their lives; a joy that could never be taken away. **This is what this year of mercy is all about.**

This same JOY has been offered to us. This promise of joy that comes from God’s presence has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> [Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*]

This season of Advent is about living in the joy already given and preparing for the deeper joy yet to come in our own lives, as we wait in joyful expectation.

People experience lots of joy and happiness preparing for the coming of Christmas. However, “True joy cannot be found in a beautifully wrapped gift, however extravagant it might be, or in a Christmas bonus, however generous, or at a Christmas party, however festive, or in the myriad of twinkling lights and decorations that bedeck our homes.” This is a passing joy, one that is not sustaining. In contrast, the true joy that comes solely from the experience of God’s presence cannot be simulated by any other source or thing. This joy will come to those who seek out and open their hearts to God’s mercy.

Have you ever been around people who seem grumpy all the time; or people who are negative or cynical; people who always see the glass half empty; people who never smile and always seem to be mad at the world; their face looking a bit lifeless or sad all the time? I think we all have run into people like this. Go through a checkout line at the grocery store. I think to myself: Do they really know the love and mercy of Jesus? Do they not know how much God loves them? Do they really know how they look to others? Perhaps they too, need this Year of Mercy!

Abraham Lincoln said, “People are about as happy as they **choose** to be.” Lincoln also said, “After the age 35, the look on your face is the one you put there.” Another person stated, “If you have been saved by Jesus, please inform your face.”

We live in a world where there is no lack of pleasure – money, comfort, and material security are often **not** lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness is what so many experience. Our society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. Because joy comes from another source. True joy is spiritual... and cannot be taken away.

Christian joy is found in the deep love of God for us. It is a joy deeply rooted in an intimate relationship with Jesus. It is the light that burns in our hearts and can never be extinguished... because God is with us. Christian joy will be present in good times and in bad; it is a joy that is compatible with pain and suffering... with illness... with failures and contradictions. These challenges and joy can fit together because it was what Jesus experienced.

Jesus, knowing of his ensuing suffering and death, said to his disciples, “*The Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*”

Where did his joy come from? The love of the Father! The Father wants to increase this joy by pouring out his mercy upon us this coming year.

Where there is great joy, it is a sign of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says, “The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Someone once said, “A gloomy soul is at the mercy of many temptations.” When joyless people look for love, joy and happiness in the wrong places, what happens? – Drugs, alcohol, sex, domestic violence, addictions, rebellion, etc. People who look for fulfillment and happiness outside of a relationship with Jesus will never find it. They will always be unhappy and joyless... and unfulfilled.

This is why this Year of Mercy is so important. *“Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness<sup>2</sup>.”*

No one is excluded from the love, joy and mercy brought by the Lord. But we must be open to it, and desire it... and seek it.

Also at the root of Christian joy, in addition to God, is charity. Our principle aim in the Christian life is to serve God and our neighbor joyfully. These were the two great commandments of Jesus. This is our true purpose in life. We have been born into this world to love God and others joyfully.

A self-centered person is unable to find joy because of the difficulty of opening him or herself to God and others. The reason charity is the root of Christian joy is that it mirrors God’s love for us.

With the time remaining in Advent, take the time to prepare your hearts and minds, letting God remove any sadness that hinders you from feeling the joy and hope which is yours in Christ Jesus. Trust in the words of the Prophet Zephaniah – *“The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love.”*

And as we enter into this Holy Year, may the healing balm of the Father’s mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away from the Lord, both the joyful and those who live in sadness, revealing that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst.

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2 [Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*]