



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Rejoice! God is with us. Come, let us adore him!

“ ‘Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you,’ the angel said. But Mary was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (cf. Lk 1:28-29).

Last weekend, we celebrated Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means rejoice. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has written that the first word of the angel’s greeting, which we translate as “hail,” might just as easily be translated as “rejoice.” That means that “rejoice” is one of the first words spoken in the New Testament.

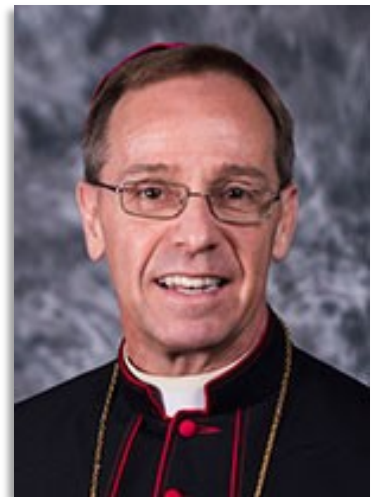
In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul tells us to rejoice always because the Lord is near. Christians should always be filled with joy, but we rejoice in a special way during the Advent and Christmas seasons because the Lord is near.

What do we mean when we say that the Lord is near?

Christ lived among us as a man 2,000 years ago. After his passion, death and resurrection, he ascended to his Father. But we Christians believe that he will come again in glory on the last day. We also believe that he is with us here and now—in the holy Eucharist and all the sacraments, in our prayer, in the works we perform in his name, and wherever two or more are gathered as his Church.

What do we mean when we say that the Lord, who is with us always, is also coming again this Christmas season and at the end of time?

Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. That means that, while he is the goal or end of human history, he is not bound by the limits of time or space as we are. As a result, he can be present with us now and, at the same time, he can be coming again in the future.



Advent celebrates this mystery. Although we know that Christ is with us always, we still wait in joyful hope for his coming again in glory. While we believe in his Real Presence in the Eucharist, we long for the more perfect communion that we will enjoy when we are with him in our heavenly home.

This “perfect communion” that is still yet to come is hinted at in the sights, sounds and smells of Christmas. The season of Christmas is the time of year when we rejoice at the coming of the Lord. We sing of his presence and we celebrate the wondrous fact that God is with us (Emmanuel), the Lord of history freely choosing to enter into our time and space in order to be one with us.

As Pope Francis teaches us, "To be full of joy is the experience of the highest consolation, when the Lord makes us understand that this is something different from being cheerful, positive, bright...No, it is another thing; it is an overflowing joy that really hits us. Receiving the joy of the Spirit is a grace."

So, we rejoice. We are filled with joy because the long-awaited Savior has come at last. We rejoice because we are not alone in a vast, uncaring universe. God is with us. He knows us—each one by name—and he loves us as his sisters and brothers in the one family of God.

But even as we rejoice at the mystery of God’s presence here and now, we also celebrate the profound hope that he will come again. The suffering and evil that we experience in this world will pass away one day. God’s kingdom will come—on Earth as it is heaven—and on that day every tear will be wiped away, and we will see God face to face.

This is the source of all our rejoicing. This is why we wait eagerly for the one we believe is our Blessed Hope. It’s why we celebrate Christ’s birth, and why we proclaim with the absolute certainty of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ has died. He is risen. He will come again!

My prayer for you and for all the clergy, religious and faithful people of the Church in central and southern Indiana is that you will be filled with an Advent hope, and that you will experience all the joys of the Christmas season. Now, with the whole Church, we proclaim: *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus! And, at the very same time, we can sing with joyful hearts: *Adeste, fidelis!* God is with us. Come, let us adore him!

A Blessed Christmas to all!

+Charles C. Thompson
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Synod process underway across central and southern Indiana

(Selected from *For a Synodal Church, Preparatory Document*, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

1. The Church of God is convoked in Synod. The path entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” will solemnly open on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following 17th of October in each particular Church. One fundamental stage will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023,¹ which will be followed by the implementation phase that will again involve the particular Churches (cf. EC, arts. 19-21).



With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”² This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. Our “journeying together” is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.

2. A basic question prompts and guides us: How does this “journeying together,” which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?

Addressing this question together requires listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind “blows where it wills; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (Jn 3:8), remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way. Thus, a dynamism is activated that allows us to begin to reap some of the fruits of a synodal conversion, which will progressively mature. These are objectives of great importance for the quality of ecclesial life and for accomplishing the mission of evangelization, in which we all participate by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. Here, we will indicate the main objectives, which decline synodality as the form, the style, and the structure of the Church:

- recalling how the Spirit has guided the Church’s journey through history and, today, calls us to be, together, witnesses of God’s love;

- living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God;
- recognizing and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family;
- exploring participatory ways of exercising responsibility in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world;
- examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel;
- accrediting the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship;
- regenerating relationships among members of Christian communities as well as between communities and other social groups, e.g., communities of believers of other denominations and religions, civil society organizations, popular movements, etc.;
- fostering the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of recent synodal experiences on the universal, regional, national, and local levels.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Advent is the time we are given to welcome the Lord who comes to encounter us, and also to verify our longing for God, to look forward and prepare ourselves for Christ's return. He will return to us in the celebration of Christmas, when we will remember his historic coming in the humility of the human condition; but he enters our heart each time we are willing to receive him; and he will come again at the end of time to "judge the living and the dead".



Therefore, we must always be vigilant and await the Lord with the hope of encountering him. During Advent, the liturgy introduces us precisely to this evocative theme of vigilance and waiting.

Jesus exhorts us to take heed and watch, so as to be ready to welcome him at the moment of his return. He tells us: “Take heed, watch ... for you do not know when the time will come.... Watch therefore ... lest he come suddenly and find you asleep” (cf. Mk 13:33-37). The person who takes heed is the one who, amid the worldly din, does not let himself be overwhelmed by distraction or superficiality, but lives in a full and conscious way, with concern first and foremost for others. With this manner we become aware of the tears and the needs of neighbors and we can also understand their human and spiritual strengths and qualities. The heedful person then also turns toward the world, seeking to counter the indifference and cruelty in it, and taking delight in its beautiful treasures which also exist and are to be safeguarded. It is a matter of having an understanding gaze so as to recognize both the misery and poverty of individuals and of society, and to recognize the richness hidden in little everyday things, precisely there where the Lord has placed us.

Being attentive and watchful are prerequisites so as not to continue to “err from the Lord’s ways”, lost in our sins and in our unfaithfulness; being attentive and being watchful are the conditions that allow God to permeate our existence, in order to restore meaning and value to it with his presence full of goodness and tenderness. May Mary Most Holy, role model for awaiting God and icon of watchfulness, lead us to her son Jesus, rekindling our love for him (Adapted from Pope Francis’s Angelus remarks, December 3, 2017).

My Prayer for You

As we continue our observance of Advent and prepare for Christmas, let us pray in the words of the Marian antiphon, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*:

Loving mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,
yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel’s joyful greeting,
have pity on us, poor sinners.

+ Charles C. Thompson