Do You Hear What I Hear?

One of my favorite modern Christmas carols is “Do You Hear What I Hear” written in 1962. It tells the story of the Birth of Christ from the perspective of shepherds who announce what they have seen.

In my life in so many ways others through their actions have revealed who God is by the way they’ve led their lives.

For instance my grandmother Pat is one of the most joyful people I’ve ever known. A woman of deep faith, what I remember the most about her was her constant joy. If she had a bad day, she wouldn’t be one to complain about it. If you came to visit, she was happy to be with you. She’d greet people always with a smile and a hug. And talking to you you were the only person who mattered at that moment.

There’s my parents too, who from an early age taught me about God by taking me to Mass, praying with me, and explained the faith to me. But then I’d also look at how they would lead their lives. We’d go to Mass no matter how busy the week was. Both would work hard to provide for the family, and to keep up our home. They’d treat one another with love. And they would help out at the church and their own parents. And, much like grandma Pat, they would do it all with a positive attitude.

This week in our Gospel, John the Baptist speaks to living out the faith as a way of life, emphasizing social justice and conversion of the heart. Faith needs to be something we testify to through a way of life. The joy that fills our hearts that is a key part of this “Gaudete Sunday” where we light the rose colored candle is something we live out.

This Gospel gives us a chance to think about the question what do others think of the faith based on how we proclaim it through our words and actions? How has the faith changed us and how then do we change this world for the better?

Going to Mass is certainly part of our faith. And if you reading this column, odds are you went to Mass and got a bulletin. But on this Third Sunday of Advent where we light the rose colored candle and rejoice as Christmas is nearing, there’s a special focus on joy. The Christian joy of rejoicing in the Lord.

It’s a good time to think about how we can radiate this joy in our lives.

For starters, we can think about what we have been blessed with by God in life. Sometimes we can focus on the negatives, but truly we have so much. If we count the blessings we have, we’ll find that there is so much to be thankful for.

With that, if people know we are Catholic, can they tell it by how we live? For some going to Mass is like going to the DMV; something they have to do but don’t think much about. For others they would have no clue a person goes to Mass at all because the person is perpetually angry, gossipy, negative, cold or judgmental. We all have down

days, but hopefully our relationship with God has an impact on our attitude so that people are attracted to the faith through our demeanor. A warm, positive attitude has a way of getting to people and transforming them too.

Lastly, hopefully our experience with God makes us want to share the faith too. By learning more about our faith and deepening our relationship with God, we should not fear talking about what we believe with others. Sometimes people misunderstand what the Church teaches, or attack the Church, and we can be fearful to ask them if they "hear what we hear" or maybe a better way of putting it, understand what they hear. Let's not forget John the Baptist was martyred for the faith. But the Christian faith did not spread through people keeping it hidden. It spread because people had the fortitude to tell others what they saw and heard through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we strive to never fear defending the faith and engaging others in discussions of what we believe and why. Whether it's people we know who are estranged from the Church, or taking the time to talk and pray with people about the faith, or even spending time with your children or grandchildren to help them understand the importance of Mass and getting to know God, we must strive to tell others what the faith is all about.

As we are reminded at the end of Mass, we have a job to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord and to be a witness to the faith. Hopefully we go to Mass because we want to grow closer to God, and what a great gift we are given in Jesus who dwells with us. Wrapping the packages we give is great, but what a great gift it would be to give someone a better relationship with God by not keeping our faith hidden, but sharing it through our words and actions over the course of our lives.

God's blessings to you on this Gaudete Sunday!

Fr. Paul