**Sunday 17th December 2023 Advent 3; Benefice Holy Communion Oswaldkirk**

**The third Sunday in Advent has traditionally been known as *Gaudete* Sunday, taken from the Latin word to ‘rejoice’. Today’s reading from the Epistle also begins with the St Paul’s command to rejoice as well as words of encouragement and support. On Gaudete Sunday**[**rose**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_(color))**-coloured vestments may be worn instead of**[**violet**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violet_(color))**, which is otherwise prescribed for every day in the season of Advent. It was also known as "Rose Sunday". In churches that have an**[**Advent wreath**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent_wreath)**, today the rose-coloured candle is lit in addition to two of the violet coloured candles, which represent the first two Sundays of Advent. Despite the otherwise sombre or fearful readings of the season of**[**Advent**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent)**, the readings on the third Sunday emphasize the joyous anticipation of the Lord's coming and thanksgiving. In his 2014 homily,**[**Pope Francis**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis)**said that Gaudete Sunday is known as the "Sunday of joy", and that instead of fretting about "all they still haven't" done to prepare for Christmas, people should "think of all the good things life has given you’.**

**We can all hopefully understand the call to rejoice, but Paul’s call may also cause us to pause and wonder whether we can rejoice when we’re sick, or in prison, bereaved? Can we rejoice when we have just lost our job and don’t know where to turn or Christmas only brings a sense of loneliness? To rejoice though doesn’t just mean being jolly, it also means to find comfort and peace to alleviate despair and loneliness, for us and those in the community who may find the festive time difficult.**

**With his instruction to, “Rejoice always.”, Paul is not speaking to individuals as much as he is to the entire community in Thessalonica. They are all to rejoice. And when? Not at a particular time, nor only in good times, but always. They are to rejoice and pray always. They are to give thanks not just for the good things that happen to them, but “in all circumstances.” But Paul’s call is simple and direct; rejoice, pray, and no matter what happens, and be thankful for the great gift of God’s Word made flesh who has come and will return.**

**We can look to God for guidance and if we have a heart to perceive, we can find things for which to give thanks and pray for. Even a cursory reading of a newspaper will tell us of situations around the world that need God’s intervention, that there are any number of people deserving of our supplications, not only our family and friends, but the church and its’ members, church and governmental leaders, the person standing in line with us at the supermarket, or who we pass on the street.**

**There is no lack of subject matter for our prayers and while we may not necessarily devote every** **minute of every day to prayer, we can live in such a way that our relationship to God is open and revealed with thanksgiving for all the blessings that we receive, great and small.**

**Above all, we can be sure, that God delivers what he promises**. **He promises most solemnly, by oath, in his covenants, such as with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses and Israel, and the new covenant sealed by the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ offered to all mankind and written on all his creation.**

**Today then on this Sunday of Joy, may each of receive St Paul’s words afresh, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.” This is God’s will for us and that it is God who will do it. You can’t do it yourself because you do not have that power, but God does and this ongoing blessing rests on God’s power and promises as St Paul says, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”**

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**