

This past August I boarded a plane from Hobart, Australia, to Sydney along with a couple of friends bound for the meeting of Societas Liturgica. Once the plane took off, I pulled out a book and opened it on my lap. My friend Cathy Murrowood asked, "What are you reading?" I said, "*Twilight*." She said, "What's *Twilight*?" Now mind you, we were on our way to attend an international gathering of liturgists from different Christian faiths. At the time, I didn't realize it would take me till December to finish all four volumes that I had with me on that plane. Anyway, when Cathy asked, "What's *Twilight*?" I answered, "It's a teenage vampire romance novel." I've known Cathy for several years, but I never knew her eyebrows could reach the heights they achieved in that moment. I said, "You have a problem with that?" I'm sure she was now wondering about my qualifications to attend this meeting, but what could she do? We were on the way. I explained I was keeping up with cultural phenomena, to know what media are communicating well to which age cohorts and why, but she wasn't buying any of it. It was true, but it's also true that I like to do some things that are just fun, whether it's reading a novel or going to a baseball game, things that may not relate directly to my work but that help me keep a happy heart.

We call the Third Sunday of Advent Gaudete Sunday, which means Rejoice Sunday. It got this name because the entrance antiphon for this mass comes from the passage we heard as our second reading today, Paul's Letter to the Philippians. In Latin it begins with the word *Gaudete*, meaning "Rejoice!" The same happy spirit appears in today's first reading from the prophet Zephaniah, where he tells the unhappy people in exile, "Shout for joy, sing joyfully, be glad and exult with all your heart." Why? The Lord has turned away your enemies; the king is in your midst; you have no further misfortune to fear. Zephaniah predicted that when they got home even God would be happy: "He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in love, he will sing joyfully because of you." It's a big party kind of prophecy.

The reason we devote the Third Sunday of Advent to this theme is that we are about halfway through the season, and Christmas is drawing near. Our waiting for Christmas is almost over, and the joy of that feast is already pulling us forward. But you know, we probably need this message for a different reason these days. We can use a reminder to keep a happy heart about Christmas. The semester is coming to an end – papers are due, exams are upon students. Shopping is becoming frantic. Even when we gather for Christmas parties, we often resent giving up a night; we check our watches and study our smart phones. We sometimes have a hard time relaxing and rejoicing, but that is what this season is for.

Oh, sometimes it is hard to feel happy; there are genuine concerns in the family; some people you love are not here; others don't feel well, or some danger threatens you. But it is especially when we face those situations that we need to hear Zephaniah's voice. The Lord is in our midst. The Lord is happy with us; the Lord is singing about us. The joy of this season is not a joy of ignoring our cares, but a joy of remembering who cares. It is the Lord.