

When Vice President Gore walked in front of the cameras this week to give his concession speech, he was smiling. I thought, "This man can't be happy." But he proceeded to give an address that was conciliatory, honest, and upbeat in its patriotism. He did what needed to be done to guide the country toward this time of transition. There will be skeptics who say that smile was artificial, but from his words and demeanor also, it seemed that the vice president had sought out an inner place of peace from which he could accept defeat because just being an American meant so much more.

Many years ago I had the honor of seeing in person, up close, a man known as Brother Roger. He founded the religious community at Taizé in France. That community, international and ecumenical, has also become well known for its music, some of which is in our hymnal. When I saw Brother Roger, he appeared to be a man in his 70s with snow white hair, and his face absolutely radiated with peace. I couldn't take my eyes off that old face and the emotion I felt, believe it or not, was jealousy and anger. "How do you get that kind of peace?" I wondered, which only showed how far away I was from the gift of peace.

In today's second reading, St. Paul tells the Philippians how they can have the gift of peace. "The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." That's his promise. How do you get that peace? Paul says, "Rejoice." Cheer up! Snap out of it! "The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all." Easier said than done with disagreements in the family, the threat of crime, impending grade cards, holiday bills, and people who still want to recount all those votes in Florida, but in Paul's view the nearness of God represents the nearness of peace. You can always find peace because God is always at your side.

The third Sunday of Advent is called "Gaudete" Sunday -- "Gaudete", the Latin word for "Rejoice!" The Sundays of the year used to be named after the first Latin chant to be sung for that day's mass. Today's chant, which is still recommended, quotes the same line we hear in the reading, "Rejoice! The Lord is near." Priests could wear rose colored vestments today to lighten up the season a bit. A friend of mine refuses to wear them because they remind him of his grandmother's underwear. He didn't want to lighten the season that much. When Advent wreaths became popular the third candle was "dressed" in the same color. Pink implies it is time to rejoice. Advent is almost over. Christmas is almost here.

But, according to St. Paul, the time to rejoice is not just the third Sunday of Advent. The time to rejoice is always. Yeah, yeah, Christmas is near. But more importantly, the Lord is near. Snap out of it!