

I don't know if anyone here would deny that the world is a mess – people go hungry and thirsty every day; basic human rights and dignity are denied to people for a wide variety of shoddy reasons; our natural environment is being destroyed by human behavior and natural disasters; violence thrives; and sometimes the power of evil seems to be winning. I believe the same problems have existed for thousands of years, and yet St. Paul wrote over and over again, "Rejoice!" "Rejoice always!" Isaiah said, "I rejoice heartily in the Lord." And Mary exclaimed in her prayer, "My whole being exults in the Lord!" How could they do that when the world was in such a state, when they were facing suffering and persecution?

To rejoice seems rather naïve, or maybe even an attempt to avoid reality? Or is it? If we can't rejoice, perhaps it's because we sometimes forget the greater reality – we have been saved from it all. Jesus Christ has come, and has already conquered the power of evil and death. We have every reason not to get lost in depression and hopelessness, but instead to rejoice in what God has done for us.

Isaiah gives us some imagery to understand why he urges us to rejoice. Many of us may know the great feeling that comes from being dressed up for a special celebration – a wedding is an obvious example: the bride and groom, the wedding party, the families and guests. But there are other occasions, like a prom, or the first reception of Holy Communion, or a special event like a party. Getting dressed up is a way of acknowledging the event is important to us, and it's also an expression of joy and excitement.

The passage from Isaiah uses that imagery to express joy as well. He says we are clothed with a *robe of salvation*; we are wrapped in a *mantle of justice* – just like brides and grooms, he says; and just like God has clothed the earth with beautiful vegetation. We hear the same thing in the New Testament – we are *clothed with Christ*, we are enveloped in the glory of the resurrection.

The joy of knowing that we're safe should shine forth through us like a light in the midst of darkness. People should see that Christians are always hopeful. Like John the Baptizer we are witnesses of the Light who has come into our world. Our rejoicing is a sign of hope to a world that cannot see. Our rejoicing shows our belief in the power of the risen Christ -- because we know that the problems of the world will not win (although sometimes I wonder if we really believe that?). Yes, we have to live with these problems; we have to work to address the problems of hunger and access to water; we have to make peace instead of responding with violence; we have to treat all people with respect and dignity; we have to protect this world that God has dressed so beautifully. We must be wrapped in the mantle of justice -- never losing hope, always rejoicing.

Today we have three young people who will celebrate with us the power of Christ. Today they will be clothed in the robe of salvation through the sacrament of Baptism; and they will be empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation. They commit themselves to be united with us to be light in the darkness and joy in the midst of despair, because they know they are clothed in the glory of the risen Christ. Let's rejoice in what God is about to do in our midst!