

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we gather for worship on this Third Sunday of Advent, the Church calls us to rejoice, reminding us that we are in a season of hope, joy, and anticipation. The word "Gaudete"—meaning "rejoice"—is not just an instruction, but a profound truth for us as believers. Our joy is not a fleeting emotion tied to circumstances, but a deep and abiding confidence found in the Lord.

Truly with joy in the Lord, five candidates were accepted into the Order of Catechumens at Our Lady of Grace Church. Their names are Treevera Lampley, Alexa Tang, Fred Husino, Darren Stuewe, and Andrew Kiesch. They publicly declared their desire to learn the teachings of Christ and live the life of a Christian. And this Saturday, 45 children will receive their first Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is the first step towards First Holy Communion, a wonderful moment when they will receive Jesus' Body and Blood in the Eucharist. As community we will continue to accompany these candidates and children in the months ahead through instruction, prayer, and the witness of our lives, as they prepare for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

I want to remind you in advance that on Tuesday, December 16th at 7:00pm we will have our Advent Penance Service in preparation for Christmas. I invite you to come early and participate in a short meditation and examination of conscience, and then the priests will go to hear confessions. We will have some Franciscan priests so there is more opportunity for everyone to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Like John the Baptist, we are called to testify to the Light. This means we should live our lives that reflect Christ, by being instruments of justice, practicing compassion, and building solidarity within our community. We are not expected to be perfect, but we are invited to live a way of compassion that can change the world in small, powerful ways.

So, as we light the rose candle on our Advent wreath this week, let us find true rejoicing in the certainty that God's mercy is stronger than cruelty, and His presence is deeper than fear. Let us resolve to be watchful, humble, charitable, and hopeful. Let us prepare our hearts and our community to truly receive Christ this Christmas and every day, ready to serve Him by serving others.

Last but not least, I thank all of you for your prayers and ask that you continue to pray for our Pastor, Fr. Raphael as he is recovering. We, the Conventual Franciscan Friars, love you and bless you with the joy of Jesus in our hearts.

In His abundant joy,

Fr. Luke Vu
Parochial Vicar