

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE B: Gaudete Sunday

Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11 + Luke 1: 46-50, 53-54 + 1 Thess. 5:16-24 + John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: December 13, 2020

Rejoice always.

We hear those words from St. Paul and immediately disregard them as being unrealistic. As the end of 2020 draws near, we struggle to rejoice for a minute or two each day, much less always.

How can we rejoice as more people in our country are getting sick and dying from COVID-19 than ever before?

How can we rejoice when so many people are losing jobs or have lost them?

How can a doctor or nurse rejoice when they are worn out by hospitals overflowing with patients gasping for their next breath?

Then there are those other realities of 2020 which cause sadness, like not being able to physically touch or be touched by vulnerable family members. Or because of the vital importance of wearing a face covering, not seeing a smile on the face of another which might stir up some joy in our heart.

Before this pandemic began, we would have had a hard time putting Paul's command to "rejoice always" into practice, but now it seems absolutely impossible.

But we should not discard the living word of God coming to us from St. Paul today that quickly.

One reason we Americans struggle to rejoice always is we equate joy with happiness. Happiness is not joy.

Happiness is fleeting, it is not lasting, because it depends on transitory things: our emotions, the state of our health, our material well-being.

Happiness is like the calm on the surface of the ocean, easily disrupted by the wind or boat traffic.

Joy is located deep below the surface that cannot be disturbed by what goes on above.

Ultimately for believers, joy is found in God.

That's right, joy is rooted in who God is.

Joy also flows from recognizing what God has done, is doing, and will do!

This 3rd Sunday of Advent is named, "*Gaudete Sunday*", and that Latin word "*Gaudete*" means "*to rejoice.*"

The quote from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians from which this Sunday receives its title is quite clear about the source of joy:

“Rejoice in the Lord always.” (Philippians 4:4)

Why rejoice?

Not only because the celebration of the Lord's birth is near, but because by the power of His Spirit He is near to us right now, coming to us right now.

Why rejoice? Because our trust lies in the Savior of the World, not in the passing things of this world.

Because we know how much we are loved by God the Father who has given us life, we rejoice even now in these difficult days.

Because of what the Son of God has done, taking our flesh and becoming human like us in all things but sin, we know how much we are loved and rejoice in that knowledge.

Because of what God is doing even now in our midst, feeding us with the Body and Blood of His Son, strengthening us by the support and love of others, bringing us to the light of another day, we rejoice.

We are filled with expectant joy because we believe the Lord Jesus by the power of the Spirit is present among us even now in ways we do not recognize, that He will come to us in surprising ways today if we are but alert and ready.

Because of what God will do in the future, faithful to his promise to bring us through death to life forever with Him, we rejoice.

Because of his glorious promise to send His Son in glory to bring an end to this world and to bring about a new heavens and new earth, where there will be no more sorrow anymore, where death will be no more, we are filled with joy.

For what God has done, for what God is doing, for what God will do, our hearts overflow with joy.

Because we are aware of the suffering of others, our joy is a clear-eyed joy.

Precisely because we rejoice always in the Lord, we see what causes sadness in His heart, what is not right in this world, the injustices that others suffer, and we do something about it.

Working to make right what has gone wrong deepens our joy, because we embrace the mission of the Lord Jesus, which is a mission he has entrusted to each of the baptized.

With him and in Him, we have been anointed to proclaim glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to bring liberty to captives, and release to prisoners. The Spirit given us in baptism and sealed in Confirmation empowers us for this mission to the marginalized of our world.

The world does not recognize the Lord Jesus present in the powerless, those whose hearts are broken with sorrow, those who suffer discrimination and are not treated as equal, even those behind prison bars. But for we who are Christian, it is in these people and in these situations that we encounter Christ coming to them in his broken, suffering body, and so we receive Him with joy.

The other joy-filled result of allowing Christ living in us to serve Christ living in the least of our sisters and brothers is that those who are poor & powerless are often the ones most filled with joy.

Why?

Because every day they depend on their Heavenly Father to provide their daily bread, knowing that everything they have been given, especially the gift of another day, comes from God.

Their joy is infectious gift to those who serve them.

If we want to rejoice always in the Lord, we need remember St. Paul's instruction that joy is connected to gratitude and prayer.

If we desire to welcome the Lord of Joy, we recall that prayer and gratitude give birth to joy.

Prayer, that ongoing conversation we have with the Lord, awakens gratitude, which then leads to joy.

Joy leads back to prayer, causing us to lift up our minds, hearts, and voices with the Blessed Virgin Mary in praise of the God who keeps doing great things for us.

We sing with Mary, "*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior ... who has done great things for me!*"

With Mary's help, we give birth to the Son of God by faith in our lives of joy-filled service.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi