



Third Sunday of Advent B December 13, 2020

♪ GAUDETE SUNDAY ♪

- **Reflections on What Helps and Hinders Us from Living Life Joyfully**
- **Witnesses to the Light**
- **Joy and Pleasure—The Difference**

The third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*. *Gaudete* is Latin for “Let us rejoice.” This weekend, we light the rose-colored candle. There is a clear note of joy in today’s first and second readings. In the first reading, Isaiah says:

*“I rejoice heartily in the Lord,
in my God is the joy of my soul.”*

In the second reading, Paul urges us to *rejoice always*. Ideally, as Christians, we should be people of joy. We should live life joyfully. Why? Because we know that despite all the hardships we experience here on earth, we are on the road to a life of eternal happiness with God the Father, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, with Mary and all the saints, and with all the angels. I often tell my guardian angel to whom I pray daily that I cannot wait to meet him and thank him for his protection of me here on earth.

The mystic Julian of Norwich once wrote: “*The greatest joy we can give Almighty God is to live life joyfully.*” The late Fr. Bernard Haring wrote: “*The spirit of joy is an infallible sign that one is a Christian.*” The worst advertisement for Christianity is a gloomy, pessimistic face. The philosopher Nietzsche once said: “*If you Christians want me to believe in your redeemer, you will have to look more redeemed.*” Someone else has said: “*If you are happy, you ought to notify your face.*”

Patricia Sanchez writes: “*True joy cannot be found in a beautifully wrapped gift, however extravagant it might be, or in a Christmas bonus, however generous, or at a Christmas party, however festive, or in the myriad of twinkling lights and decorations that festoon our homes, shops and places of business. On the contrary, the true joy that comes solely from the experience of God’s presence cannot be simulated by any other source.*”

(Used with permission *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years A, B, C*, by Patricia Sanchez, -Sheed & Ward publisher (9-1-89))

As followers of Christ, our joy must be rooted in the belief and, hopefully, in the *felt experience* that God loves us unconditionally, and that Christ through his Resurrection has defeated suffering, evil and death. We will experience suffering, evil and death in this life but these do not have the last word. In the end, if we are connected to Christ, we will defeat all the enemies of life and enter into the joy of the Lord.

Joy killers — What steals your joy?

What steals our joy? This is a great question and one worth reflecting on. The following are some possible joy killers.

- *Self-pity*. If we indulge a lot in “poor me” parties, we will not be joyful.
- *Envy*. If we are always looking over our shoulders to see what others have, we will not be joyful.
- *Negative attitude*. If we have a tendency to always look at the glass as half empty, we will not be joyful.
- *Cynicism*. It has been said that one of the temptations of aging is cynicism. Why is this? Perhaps because many of our dreams have not materialized, especially dreams for material and relational success.
- *Unforgiving heart*. If we *deliberately* carry vengeful thoughts and refuse to even pray for the grace to let go of life’s hurts, we will never be happy.
- In your opinion, what are other joy-killers?

What helps us to live more joyful lives?

- Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Paul in his Letter to the Galatians (5:22). A good prayer practice is too often ask the Holy Spirit to help us grow the fruit of joy in our daily lives.
- *Believing in the depths of our heart that God loves us unconditionally*. We may believe this foundational truth in our heads but if we don’t believe it in our *hearts*, Christian joy will elude us.
- *Accepting our current reality*. While we should try to change what *needs* to be changed and *can* be changed in our lives—be it work, relationships, health, faith, etc.—some things cannot be changed, e.g., certain physical disabilities, our past, our losses, the aging

process, etc. Each day, we have the *choice* to either accept our present reality or to constantly reject or deny it. For example, we can accept and live with the fact that our childhood was unhappy; that some people took advantage of us and betrayed us; that we had an accident that left us physically disabled, etc.— or we can daily hate our reality. We do not have to love the painful things that happened to us, but we need to come to terms with them or we will never experience joy. Rather, we will forever be miserable.

In her book *The Strength Within*, Barbara Hanson talks about how she came to terms with a car accident that left her a paraplegic at the age of nineteen. It is a most inspiring story of how one person came to terms with an event that had long-term consequences. Again and again, Hanson says that while we may not have much control over the circumstances of our lives, we do have control over our *attitude* toward those circumstances. It is our attitude that will make or break us. We often see two people with very similar set of circumstances, e.g., a particular illness, loss of a loved one, abuse in childhood. While one may be filled with bitterness and resentment over his/her adversity, the other may have come to terms with his/her circumstances and is living life with a reasonable amount of joy and peace. So coming to terms with our past misfortunes—failures, hurts, accidents, bad experiences—will most certainly lead us to live life more joyfully, whereas failing to deal with them will, most certainly, hinder us from experiencing the joys of life.

The "acceptance attitude" also comes into play when we are dealing with other frustrations, e.g., the aging process, our own and other people's limitations. Joy will always elude us if we are constantly trying to *control* and *change* others. Likewise, joy will be lacking if we are *perfectionists* and have little or no acceptance of our own limitations. Surely, we should change what we can and always try to improve our performance, but that goal must be balanced with a basic acceptance of what is imperfect today in ourselves, in others, and in our life situation.

- *Accepting the past as history, the future as mystery, and the present as a gift.* We can't change the past. All we can do is change our *attitude* toward the past. We can't control the future. Our best-made plans may blow up in pieces any moment. But we can place the future in God's hands, trusting all will be well. Preoccupation with the past or future hinders us from enjoying the gift that is today. So we must learn to let go of the past, trust the future, and live today as fully and joyfully as we can.

- *Taking time to go within to reflect and pray.* True happiness and joy are found within and not in other

people and the external world. Bestselling author, Fr. John Powell, S.J., says, "*Happiness is an inside job.*" Pope Benedict believes that joy flows from living in harmony with our God, with others and with God's creation.

- *Taking time to count our blessings.* Focusing on the cup that is half full and not on what might be missing from our lives.

- *Giving expression to what we feel passionate about.* Each of us, whether we know it or not, has one or more passions in life (cooking, gardening, painting, fishing, woodworking, etc.). We need to honor our passions by giving them expression. Writing has brought much joy to my life.

Reflections questions

- What speaks to you most in this column?
- What helps or hinders you from living life more joyfully?

Other keys to living a joyful life

I found the following on the internet. It did not have an author. But I do like these seven keys for joyful living.

Know your purpose. Nothing will bring you more joy than knowing why you are here. Not knowing brings sadness, wondering, fear and lack of fulfillment.

Live purposefully. Once you know your purpose, you need to live according to that purpose. This is a simple matter of priorities. Let your actions and your schedule reflect your purpose. Don't react to circumstances and let them cause you to lose sight of it.

Stretch yourself. Don't settle into the status quo. Always look to stretch yourself. Whatever you are doing, do more. Stretching yourself will allow you to go beyond your self-imposed boundaries and find joy in your expanded horizons.

Give more than you take. It brings happiness to accumulate. It brings joy to give away.

Surprise yourself, and others, too. Every once in a while, do the unexpected. Doing so will make everyone sit back and say, "Wow! Where did that come from?" It will put a little joy not only in your life, but in theirs as well.

Indulge yourself sometimes. Too much indulgence, though, and you will be caught in the happiness trap. But if you will allow yourself an occasional indulgence as a reward for a job well done and a life well lived, you will appreciate the indulgence and experience the joy of it.

Laugh! Most people are just too serious. We need to laugh a little—no, a lot! Learn to laugh daily, even if you have to laugh in bad situations. Life is to be enjoyed! The next time you go to the movie rental store, get a comedy and let loose! Joy can be yours! Look for it, pursue it and enjoy it!

Witness to the Light

The following two reflections are by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

John the Baptist had a central role to play in the coming of the Saviour. His role, as today's Gospel puts it, was to be 'a witness to speak for the light.' The light in questions was Jesus.

John proved to be a courageous and effective witness. He was a strong personality and a man of principle. He didn't go in for a life of comfort. He lived not in a palace but in the desert. His lifestyle, as well as his personal integrity, lent credence to his words. He was a living example of what he preached. And when his task was done, he moved aside to make way for Jesus.

Jesus still needs witnesses. Fortunately, there still are people who witness faithfully and at great personal cost.

A few years ago a priest made a visit to China. While there he met an elderly couple who were both doctors. They had studied together at medical school, fallen in love and married. She was a Catholic, he was not. She wanted to convince him that he should join the Church, but he did not wish to be baptized. A short time later she had a child.

During one of China's political movements, the husband, along with several other intellectuals, was arrested and sent to a labour camp. The separation was very difficult for the wife, who had to work long hours at the hospital during the day and care for her son at night. In addition to her loneliness, she was under pressure from the Government to divorce her husband and to renounce her religion, so that she could gain political advantages. But she refused. Every night after she returned home, she and her son knelt down to pray and ask strength from God to endure the difficulties.

At the end of the 1970's, she heard that her husband and other intellectuals were to be allowed to come home. When the day came, she and her son went to the railway station, where they were the only family members on the platform to welcome the men. Unable to endure the long separation, all the other women had divorced and remarried. Deeply moved, her husband took instruction and was later baptized.

John the Baptist bore witness to the light. So did the woman in the story. Now it's our turn. For many people in the world today Christ has become a very dim figure. The words of today's Gospel are literally true: 'There stands one among you whom you know not.' Christ still needs witnesses, people who can effectively make him present to other people.

We can't be a witness for the light if we are living in darkness. We have to be living in the light. A good life is a strong and effective witness, and in itself is a proclamation of the Gospel. When religious practice leads to deeds, a very effective witness is given. No witness reaches our contemporaries as persuasively as the witness of those who do what Jesus commanded.

Without the witness of Christians the face of Christ, already blurred, will continue to fade from our world. He will continue to stand among us, unknown and unrecognized. And hearts will remain broken, and people will remain imprisoned in darkness, and the good news will not be preached to the poor.

The task is not one for the individual Christian only but for the Christian community as a whole. It is easier to witness to Christ as a member of a supportive community.

Joy and pleasure - the difference

There is a clear note of joy in today's liturgy.

Joy is not the same as pleasure.

Pleasure is of the body; joy is of the spirit.

Pleasure is like a flare in the night;

it brightens things up for a while, but dies quickly, leaving us darker and emptier than ever.

Joy, on the other hand, is like a bright fire in the hearth; even when it dies down, it leaves a warm glow behind it.

Joy in the heart is the surest sign of the presence of God.

(Used with permission granted by Dominican Publications, www.dominicanpublications.com. *New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies*, by Flor McCarthy.)

Have a blessed week,

