



Third Sunday of Advent December 17, 2017 B

♪ GAUDETE SUNDAY ♪

• Reflections on What Helps and Hinders Us from Living Life Joyfully

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.*”

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. What else steals your joy?

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 to 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.

Fr. BK returns to his home diocese the end of the year. After much prayer and reflection, Fr. BK has decided to return to his home diocese in Peoria, Illinois. We are grateful for his time here and wish him well as he returns to his first love.

Please note: Next weekend, the Fourth Sunday of Advent (and also Christmas Eve), there will be only *two* Masses for you to fulfill your Sunday obligation: Saturday Vigil Mass at 4:30pm and Sunday 10:00am Mass (which replaces the 7:30, 9:30 and 11:30am Masses). On Christmas Eve, we have five Masses.

Prayer to St. Joseph

O blessed Joseph,
faithful guardian of my Redeemer, Jesus
Christ, protector of thy chaste spouse,
the Virgin Mother of God,
I choose thee this day to be my special patron
and advocate and I firmly resolve
to honor thee all the days of my life.
Therefore I humbly beseech thee
to receive me as thy client,
to instruct me in every doubt,
to comfort me in every affliction,
to obtain for me and for all
the knowledge and love of the Heart of Jesus,
and finally to defend and protect me
at the hour of my death. Amen.

Have a blessed week,

