

Joy
3rd Sunday of Advent (B)
(Is 6:1-11; Lk 1:46-48; 1Th 5:16-24)

Gaudium – joy – is an important theme of Advent, as the popular Advent hymn “O Come Emanuel” sings in its refrain: “Rejoice, rejoice! Emanuel shall come to thee O Israel.” On this third Sunday it is proclaimed throughout the readings and liturgy.

The Mass begins with an opening antiphon from Philippians: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice*” (Phi 4:4). Then in the first reading Isaiah the prophet proclaims, “*I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul*” (Is 11:10). Mary echoes these words in her Magnificat, which serves as today’s Responsorial Psalm: “*My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” (Lk 1:47). St. Paul urges the Thessalonians to “*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all circumstances give thanks*” (1Th 5:16).

St. Thomas Aquinas defines joy as the delight which is experienced when the object of love is present. If God has become man and been born of the Virgin Mary, we have a reason for profound joy. Christian joy is a profession of faith in the Incarnation. Christians live from the perspective of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, but before that we live from the perspective of Christmas: Jesus is “Emanuel,” God-with-us.

Joy is one of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, second in importance after charity (Gal 5:22 – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...”). The fruits of the Spirit are found wherever the Spirit of God dwells in a soul. You can never see the Holy Spirit, you can only see His fruits. If someone has the Holy Spirit in him—the Spirit of God dwelling in his human spirit—there will be charity and joy and the other fruits. Likewise, if we are not at peace, if we are impatient, if there is no joy and charity, it means our relationship with God is suffering and in need of reconciliation, grace is missing.

Isaiah says in the first reading, “*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor*” (Is 11:1). Through baptism and confirmation we are anointed with the Spirit of the Lord God, who brings glad tidings of joy to the world. Christ is made known through the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts.

The joy of Christmas is unlike any other joy we experience due to a person or thing. All other joy is fragile, and subject to change or loss. Spiritual joy, on the other hand, can only be lost through sin, if through our free will we reject it. No spiritual power or human circumstance can forcefully remove it.

To reveal and deepen this Joy, God will allow it to be tested, purified, and distinguished from lesser joys. The example of Job in the Old Testament shows how God allows the devil to assault His just servant. The evil one works through many different tragic life circumstances to bring Job to despair, to the point of cursing God and his existence, and to convince him he is sinful and evil. Job never succumbs. “*In all circumstances*” he gives thanks, as St. Paul urges. Through his trials, Job more perfectly recognizes, embraces, and submits to God. Job never loses God, whose love transcends every evil.

God was already present to His people in the Old Testament, but the Nativity of the Lord at Bethlehem vastly exceeds even the greatest theophanies of the past. The Nativity establishes a permanent and invincible source of joy in the world that is immune to every assault of darkness, and every effort to deny God.

Therefore, in addition to the prayer of longing and expectation (first Sunday of Advent); in addition to the prayer of repentance and contrition (second Sunday of Advent); let us “rejoice always” and in all circumstances pray with *thanksgiving*. May our participation in the holy season deepen and purify our Joy.