

Third Sunday of Advent - 2021

What brings joy into your life? The Third Sunday of Advent, or *Gaudete* Sunday in Latin, lights the rose candle and invites us through the Scriptures and prayers to rejoice – sometimes easier said than done.

Advertisers press us to spend; news reports often urge us to alarm; many voices and events plant suspicious and divisions and a hypercritical spirit that can seep into even faithful hearts. Along with the troubles, there are also lots of opportunities for distraction, amusement, and entertainment in our society, some which promise happiness but end up leaving us empty. God invites us to something far more enduring and resilient – God desires us to know JOY.

46 years ago, St. Paul VI wrote an exhortation called *Gaudete in Domino* ... Rejoice in the Lord. Pope Paul is often remembered for *Humanae Vitae* and concluding the Second Vatican Council, but *Gaudete in Domino* reveals another side of him, deep wells of spiritual wisdom about trust and the joy that is the gift of the Holy Spirit to bring us comfort in troubling times. Pope Paul's words are as fresh as today's headlines. Already in 1975 he wrote: ***“The difficulty in attaining joy seem to us particularly acute today. Technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual. Money, comfort, and material security are often not lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness affect many. Does the future perhaps seem too uncertain, human life too threatened? Or is it not perhaps a matter of loneliness, of an unsatisfied thirst for love, of an ill-defined emptiness? In many regions and sometimes in our midst, the sum of physical and moral sufferings weighs heavily: so many starving people, so many victims of fruitless combats, so many people torn from their homes! These miseries are perhaps not deeper than those of the past but they are better known and they overwhelm people's minds. Often there seems to be no adequate solution to them.”*** [end quote]

Where then is joy? Paul says we begin by savoring the many human joys that God places in our path: the very joy of being alive; the joy of human love in family and friendships; the peaceful joy of nature and silence; the joy of work well done and duty performed; the uplifting joy of goodness, service and sharing; the demanding joy of sacrifice. To find Christian joy presupposes a person capable of natural joy.

But joy is not merely a human experience; ***it is a divine gift***. If we lose our sense of the sacredness of life and of ourselves, we lose our connection with God and sever our link to spiritual joy ... a joy that can co-exist with suffering and realism about the problems of life, but a joy that sustains us in hope that does not disappoint. ***In the end, Christian joy is not an attitude we take or an optimism we display; it is a gift we receive. Christian joy is nothing other than the joy of Jesus Christ ... not simply joy like His, but the very joy that Jesus Himself experiences.*** The secret of that joy of Jesus, as Paul says, is the absolute assurance, even on the Cross, of the Father's love. This is not something we can control, purchase, find online, create for ourselves; as a gift, we can only receive it. This explains true Christmas joy: that God has come to save us. Sorrow and loss remain among us, but they are not stronger. The last word in Jesus is not defeat or death ... it is JOY. And so, Paul concludes, ***"it would be very strange if this Good News, which evokes the alleluia of the Church, did not give us the look of those who are saved."*** The troubles of life are real. But if we only complain, criticize, tear down, feed on negativity, we simply add to the problems. But when we allow joy to lift our spirits, we bring something new, something divine, to a world so much in need of Good News. Hear again the words of St. Paul: ***"The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** May you know this Joy today.