

Seeking & Experiencing Joy Through Our Faith Fr. Leo

In this third Sunday of Advent, the church celebrates what is known as Gaudete Sunday to rejoice because our time of waiting is almost coming to an end. That's why the churches are going to be adorned in the Rose Colors, whether they be the vestments or the decor, you're going to start to see churches putting up some of the Christmas decorations or Advent decorations that look an awful lot like Christmas. People are getting excited. But before we can rejoice, we have to know that joy is only manifest when we've experienced some suffering. People who have suffered and experienced the healing are those who truly know the joy of the Lord. And so we begin with our opening collect and prayer.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. "Oh God who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's nativity. Enable us we pray to attain the joys of so greater salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever, Amen.

This is an interesting time during the Advent season, because again, everyone has just rushed in already celebrating Christmas as if it's already there, but it's not. We're still in the process of waiting and preparing, which is why we will hear once again images of John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord. Let's admit it. We're all rushing literally until the point of Christmas to prepare for Christmas, whether it be last minute buying and shopping or cleaning the house, or cooking this, that and the other. But it's the same in our relationship with God. It just takes literally a discipline to do so.

Which is why the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, that we hear about talks about who we are and how we are called to be more than just people waiting for Jesus. We're called to be one with Him to be literally anointed with Him and by Him. And so, you're going to actually hear images of baptism in these readings for this third Sunday of Advent. The spirit of the Lord, God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce of year of favor from the Lord, a day of vindication by our God. And then it talks about how in my God is the joy of my soul for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride decked with their jewels.

As the Earth brings forth its plants and a garden make its growth spring up. So will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations. This is still a time of waiting. Interesting, the joy that these people are experiencing in the Prophet Isaiah, it's things that will come. It's not things that have happened. It's things that will eventually take place. And what eventually is going to take place is that we will eventually rejoice in the Lord, but between now and then we still have a lot of work to do whether it be in waiting or preparing or just the toils of life.

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And that's it why it's kind of interesting because this week's Psalm is not actually a Psalm. It's actually a song originally from Hannah, but also reprised by our blessing mother, it's called the Magnificat from Luke's gospel. And the Psalm response is simply my soul rejoices in my God. My soul rejoices in my God. This is interesting because Mary is rejoicing in what God has done for her in giving her a child. But her joy is never going to be completed until it gets to heaven. And between now and the time that she is assumed body and soul into heaven, she's going to experience the seven sorrows in her heart.

And so, we've got to know something about these readings. They're not talking about just simply rejoicing now because Oh, isn't life great, because let's admit life isn't always great. But if you have faith, you will be able to rejoice. That's why the Prophet Isaiah is talking about the joy that comes when we do certain things. When we bring glad tidings to the poor, when we heal the brokenhearted, when we proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners and announced a year of favor of the Lord. And I think that one reason why we don't experience joy now is because we haven't done any of those things. We haven't actually heated the church's council to actually perform the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy.

So, because I don't want to just simply do a Bible study. I want to make sure that these are formational documents. These readings are trying to teach us to do something. That's why the Psalm response from the Canticle of Mary, from Luke's gospel, we'll talk about the justice that our world needs through just people like you and me in order for us to experience the joy. This is the Psalms. It's talking about how God looks on the lowly servant. He's going to tear down the mighty from the thrones, and he's going to lift up the lowly. He's going to feed the hungry with good things. And the rich He's going to send away empty.

Basically, reminding us once again of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. And if we're not doing these things, then we're not really experiencing true joy. If we're not instructing the ignorant, if we're not counseling the doubtful, if we're not admonishing the sinner or bearing patiently any wrongdoings done to us, if we're not forgiving other people's offenses or comforting the afflicted, or praying for the living in the dead, then I can see how we don't know joy. If we're not doing the corporal works of mercy, like feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned and burying the dead with grace. Then we're not going to experience joy.

For that reason, we kind of take a look at what Saint Paul tells the people of Thessalonica. He tells them, "brothers and sisters rejoice always. And then his next line is, pray without ceasing." In other words, if you're not praying ceaseless, then we're not going to be able to rejoice always. And if we do have faith and guess what we'll be able to do in all circumstances, give thanks for this is the will of God for you. Do not quench the spirit. Don't despise prophetic utterances, test everything, retain what is good refrain from every kind of evil and may the God of peace make you perfectly Holy and may you entirely spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

You see, Saint Paul knows that if we are not praying without ceasing then we're not going to experience joy. We sometimes think that joy is just like a big party, Christmas, 24/7 but before you can get there, you've got to do a lot of toil and a lot of work. What does that toil and work?

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The spiritual and the corporal works of mercy. And when we do this, guess what we become, God's anointed ones. And that's why in the gospel of John, we hear once again the testimony of John the Baptist. He came for testimony to testify to the light so that all my belief through Him, he was not the light but he came to testify to the light. And that's why John the Baptist will say, "My joy is not found in me. It's found in Him who I am proclaiming. I am here to make sure as the prophet that we will be able to hear the voice of the one crying out in the desert."

You see John is the one to baptize us in water. Jesus will baptize in spirit. Jesus is the one who gives us joy and John the Baptist isn't even worthy to untie his sandal. And this reading from the gospel, according to John takes place while John was baptizing people. And I like this word baptism, because you know what, we're going to be greeting the child Jesus soon. And I think when families bring children to this world, one of the things they need to be thinking about is the baptism of their child. But please know this, the word baptism isn't acute celebration. The word literally could mean either immersion or drowning. And that's why the baptism of font is not only considered a womb where life comes. It's also considered a tomb where sin is put to death. And so in our practice of faith, as we are hearing these readings, there should be a couple things that strike us, or at least admonish us and encourage us.

We need to continue the traditions of the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy because only in living our faith and not just talking about it, but actually living it we will experience joy. That's why Mother Teresa even in her dark night of the soul, always seem to exude joy. Even though she herself was experiencing a mystical participation in the desolation of the cross, she became a light for other people. She was reflecting the light of Christ and she would give joy to others. Even if she herself wasn't feeling it. She had faith that she will experience the joy of the Lord.

And why? Because she was practicing what she's preaching. And she's only preaching what the church's teachings are that we've got to literally die to our sins. And if we're truly anointed, coming out of those waters as God's children then we will do the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy and not only experience and interior joy. But we will be a source of joy for others. Mother Teresa again gave a great definition of joy. J-O-Y, Jesus, others, and you in that order. This third Sunday of the Advent season, Gaudete Sunday, rejoice everyone. It's not a suggestion. It's a command. How do we do it? Jesus can tell us.

And I pray that these reflections give you encouragement and joy as we give Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace. Thanks be to God.