

Third Sunday in Advent

Gaudete Sunday

December 16, 2018

Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.

Joy is the main theme of the readings today. It is mentioned four times in the First Reading, twice in the Psalm, and twice in the second reading. And we might presume that those who listened to John the Baptist and repented would have experienced joy in their hearts.

In the First Reading, from the prophet, Zephaniah, Jerusalem and its people are called to celebration, for two reasons:

1. Retribution is at an end.
2. God is once again taking up his residence in the Holy City.

Historically, this refers to the Jew's repossession of the city and the rebuilding of the Temple (546 B.C.):

"Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!"

The Responsorial is from the prophet, Isaiah: "Cry out with joy and gladness; for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel," the response reads. Which leads to renewed confidence and courage in God's faithful love for the nation.

In the Second Reading, St. Paul is in prison and yet he is able to speak to the Philippians of joy. "Brothers and sisters: rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice – for the Lord is near.

The Lesson here: the unity of the believer with the risen Christ produces a peace of mind and heart – even when we are in "dire straits."

II

Christianity was never intended to be a grim and stern religion. If we are totally involved in a great faith adventure, surrounded by God's love, then joy should be primary for us.

Spiritual writer, Father John Powell put it this way: "If you're happy, let your face know." By a smile, by laughter.

In her Magnificat, Our blessed Mother, exclaimed: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior."

To further illustrate the lesson of joy, here are some answers from a Catholic elementary school test. The children were asked questions about the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament.

1. In the first book of the Bible, Guinnessis (an Irish malt), God got tired of creating the world so he took the Sabbath off.
2. The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert (desert).
3. The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
4. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines (concubines).
5. When Mary heard that she was to be the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta (the Magnificat).
6. The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

III

What gives you joy?

There is natural joy, like the laughter of a child, quality family time, a special piece of music, Christmas songs, a good (clean) joke, and so forth.

And there is supernatural joy: a moment when you feel God's love. These usually come unexpectedly and touch us at a deep level.

CONCLUDING PRAYER:

Loving God, whose dwelling place
is in the secret wellspring of heavenly light,
send forth your light and truth, that every

secret fear in our hearts might be open to joy.
(by Hugh Oliphant)

AMEN

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