

Our first two readings are full of the words rejoice, joy, gladness, exult. But if you're fatigued just thinking about how much is left to prepare for Christmas, what's there to rejoice about? ... Plenty!

Faithful Christians rejoice because each one of us is offered the greatest gift of all: eternal life with God through Christ. Christ's resurrection means our resurrection, Christ opened the gates of heaven for his faithful. Every Mass celebrates this prospect of eternal life offered to us, that Christ will claim us when he comes again in glory, that began at Christmas when God puts skin on.

True joy starts with faith and continues in church. But it takes some work. I still see people sitting stiffly in the pews; if I make a joke there's barely a ripple of laughter; when we say or sing "alleluia" or "rejoice," people have a poker face. Folks, this is not a contest about who can look the most pious! Worship is to renew our joy, be something we look forward to, that helps us in the week ahead.

Different priests have different styles, but as I understand what scripture says about worship, I believe you can be reverent and still rejoice. So let's rejoice that God the Father sent his Son Jesus to reconcile us with God, to make things right again, so that we can have eternal life with God.

We come here to increasingly appreciate the meaning of Christ's Resurrection and ours, to savor it, to share it. I want you to experience ongoing renewal of your joy, so you can celebrate the Mass.

Relax in the pew. Laugh when something's funny. And follow the advice we were given at The Amazing Parish training: if you have the joy of Jesus in your heart, be sure to inform your face! ... Exercise your smile muscles! Like Pope Francis says, "We can't proclaim Jesus with funeral faces."

Disciples share their joy in Jesus's resurrection and their own. St. Paul understood this. In the Second Reading, he orders the Philippians to rejoice; he commands it, twice! Rejoice because of Jesus's gifts to us: Jesus has saved us, he's given us security, and resurrection and eternal life, that no one can take away from us. Paul knows that when we have Resurrection joy in our heart, we'll have the strength to face any challenge we may encounter. That joy is here; renew it here every weekend.

Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Joy is an interior attitude, the outlook of hope that Jesus gives us. When tragedy strikes, we can still carry the joy of the Resurrection in our heart. It reminds us that nothing in this world is final, nothing is "the end," it gives us peace of mind and heart.

Joy is the center of Christian discipleship. It tells us we are unconditionally loved by God, and that God rejoices over us, he delights in us; our First Reading even says God "sings joyfully because of you," that we are God's song. Christian joy in the Resurrection liberates us from fear and anxiety and depression.

Jesus doesn't promise us freedom from suffering. He's promised us crosses. But our joy goes deeper than suffering. Our friendship with Christ, our communion with Christ, is the source of

our joy. Strive to know and love Christ a little more every day by praying, and imitate Christ by treating others as we would like them to treat us.

Rejoice in Christ's promises, and anxiety, worry or sadness won't dampen the Good News we know. We're here to worship God and renew our joy through our brothers and sisters with us. When Deacon Corey says "Go" at the end of Mass, go and spread your Christian joy in Christ's Resurrection and ours. Our world is hungering for the peace found in Christian joy.

Fr. John Ozella, 3rd Sunday of Advent, December 16, 2018