

The opening prayer and all of the readings today are about joy – some might say, well not the Gospel, because John the Baptist doesn't appear to be joyful. But John doesn't need a happy face to have biblical joy. He was on fire for his vocation; he loved his ministry; it gave him great joy!

It gave him great joy because, as St. Paul wrote in our Second Reading, he rejoiced in the Lord. Biblical joy is not the same thing as happiness; it's not a feeling. It's an interior attitude, an outlook on life we can keep going, even when we're experiencing a broken heart, fears, or any kind of hurt.

Christians can have joy because God promises that evil will not have the last word. We rejoice because God loves each of us so much He sent his Son to forgive our sins and reconcile us to God. We have joy because Jesus wants to lead us into His own home in Heaven; He wants us to share in God's life, like a divine blood transfusion in which God's own life is poured into our souls.

Joy is the satisfaction we experience whenever we come into possession of something good. The good thing Christians possess is the special awareness that God is always with us, knows us thoroughly, and loves us without hesitation, for eternity.

The deepest desire we have is to be understood and loved completely, unconditionally and forever by another person. Only God can fulfill that desire. That's why we rejoice in the Lord!

How can we maintain that awareness of our intimacy with God, to keep our joy strong, even when our lives become difficult? The answer to that, the saving grace that keeps our awareness of our intimacy with God fresh, is through prayer.

I keep repeating and emphasizing the importance of prayer for that reason. Satan's minions take advantage of our busy lives to tempt us to relegate prayer to last place, to put it off, so we don't get around to it. And then, without prayer, no surprise, the troubles of life discourage us and make us sad, disappointed, depressed.

It's a struggle for all of us, including me, to make a commitment to dedicate some timeslot each day to be alone with God so we can speak our heart to Him. But that's when Christ will remind us that He is with us, guiding us and loving us, even during life's difficulties. He will remind us that God is able to bring good things out of bad situations. If God could take the crucifixion, and bring Resurrection out of it, we can be confident that God can still surprise us!

The advertising world makes empty promises of joy, since anything it offers is only temporary. Many people go that route, and will still find themselves dissatisfied, because anything we can buy doesn't last. Our hearts are hungry for a joy that will never go away, and only Christ is the source of true and lasting joy. Christ lets us look forward to fullness of life with God forever.

All Christians have a vocation to joy: to cultivate a good relationship with Jesus Christ in the core of our being, to treasure it above anything else, because it benefits us.

How much are we living with Christian joy? Is Christ the joy of our soul, of our personality? Do our lives point to him? Or are we just giving it lip service? Do our lives testify to the Light of Christ in the darkness surrounding us, by giving hope and joy to people who need our help, that their struggles will pass?

Make a commitment to daily prayer so we can live out our vocation to joy, and bring Christian joy into someone's life who we know is hurting or lonely during this season. Bring them the good news that Jesus Christ loves them and cares about them always.

Third Sunday of Advent  
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