

Third Sunday of Advent C - How can we Keep from Singing for Joy!

December 15, 2024

Rejoice! St. Paul commends in the Second Reading, (Phil. 4:4-7) “Brothers and sisters: rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice.” The word for rejoice in Latin is *gaudete*, so quite naturally this Sunday is called Gaudete Sunday. Why all this rejoicing? Are we finally getting a break from somber Advent? Advent can be full of fear and worry, even though there are supposed to be celebrations of peace and love. What if things don’t go right? What if our relationships are strained? What if our debt catches up to us? What if everything is changing and we do not know what to do? What if addiction, death, illness or unemployment have robbed us of joy? And it does. Even what if the prime rib for Christmas supper is burnt? What if ... During this season, and in fact, every season, fear and worry can be useful emotions that invite us to change or protect ourselves from harm. But fear and worry are not states in which we are always meant to live. Christian joy does not come from the absence of sorrow, pain or trouble but from an awareness of the presence of Christ within our souls. Paul was suffering in prison when he was writing his letter to the Philippians calling them to be happy and Zephaniah was rejoicing at the height of the Jewish exile. Most likely both of them were in a more disastrous circumstance than ours yet they did not allow their pain to rob them of joy because they were grounded in the peace of God who wants us to be happy. Happiness comes from doing good, being honourable and showing concern for those in need despite our own weaknesses.

Advent is like a retreat that the worldwide Church is making. In this third week we will consider our lives in the context of the great beauty God has put in us and around us. Can we let it in? A line in the First Reading (3:14-18A) puts this in stunning terms. Zephaniah actually says that the Lord “will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival.” Have you ever in your life thought that God might break into song because of you? Yes, because of you! Have you ever allowed your idea of God expand that far? Have you ever imagined God as one who sings you into existence? In the sixth book of Narnia *Chronicles* by C. S. Lewis, the Magician’s Nephew, the children arrive in Narnia before anything is created. They witness Aslan, (Lion, a Christ figure) creating the world of Narnia. He brought everything – from the creatures, to the landscapes, to the sky and the stars – into being from an empty dark void, by singing and roaring. When the voice goes high, birds, clouds and blue sky appear. At a certain lengthy tune, the mountains raise their heads. And a deep vibration creates the depths of seas. Creation seems to be made out of melody. God’s gladness sings out joyfully at every instant, and his song is the earth, the galaxies, the people, the plants, the animals, sunrise and sunset, and everything else that exists!

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is a true event. Five months into World War I, the sounds of rifles firing and shells exploding faded in a number of places along the Western Front on Christmas Eve. Many German, British and French troops sang *Silent Night* and other Christmas carols to each other across the lines, and at certain point the Allied soldiers even heard brass bands joining the Germans in their joyous singing. At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no man’s land, calling out “Merry Christmas” in their enemies’ native tongues. At first, the Allied soldiers feared it was a trick, but seeing the Germans unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and shook hands with the enemy soldiers. The men exchanged presents of cigarettes and plum puddings, and sang carols and songs. The soldiers from opposing sides even played a good-natured game of soccer.

This week, prepare for Jesus with the words of the prophet Zephaniah: “The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you with his love.” If Christmas can bring truce in the middle of war, sure it will bring peace and joy in this hostile world. If our fear and worry are bigger than prayer, do not wait until after Christmas to reach out and ask for help or make changes. Remember, we are God’s song. When God is with us and in us, how can we keep from singing for joy? The joy which stems from our faith means that whether playing or praying, laughing or weeping, walking or dancing, Christ shines forth

from us. No one who has ever experienced this joy would exchange it for all the pleasures and comforts of this world. Let our life sing. Let our life be what it is: God's joyous, interleaved and always consonant melody. It sounds outwards in peace and deepest joy. Could this be our Advent? "My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentations. I hear the real though far off hymn, that hails a new creation. No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock I'm clinging. It sounds an echo in my soul, How can I keep from singing. I lift mine eyes the cloud grows thin, I see the blue above it. And day by day this pathway smooths, since first I learned to love it. The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing. All things are mine since I am His, How can I keep from singing." (Lyrics, How Can I Keep From Singing)

The test of Christianity in troubled waters is not to be overly concerned with what's happening but to face the world with hope and confidence. The purpose of our whole being, as intended by our Creator, is happiness. Let us keep on singing come what may!!