

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent which is officially known in the Church as “Gaudete Sunday.” And so today is one of two days of the liturgical year when the Church encourages the use of rose-colored vestments. So why am I wearing a rose vestment today? Well everything we do in the Catholic Church, especially in our worship, involves a beautiful symbolism which points to deeper spiritual realities. So being “Gaudete Sunday,” the word “gaudete” is a Latin command which literally means, “rejoice!” So the color rose symbolizes joy—trust me, it’s not an awkward fashion statement.

If you noticed in the readings today, much of what the Lord is saying to us involves “joy.” In the first reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah, we hear, “Shout for *joy*, O daughter Zion! Sing *joyfully*, O Israel!” In the Responsorial Psalm, we hear, “Cry out with *joy* and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel!” And in the second reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, we hear, “*Rejoice* in the Lord *always*. I shall say it again: *rejoice!*”

So what *is* joy? Is joy reducible solely to laughter and smiling all the time? No, that’s not joy. Although laughter and smiling can be

indicative of joy, joy is a much a deeper condition of the soul. Joy is the peaceful certainty within one's heart that *in Christ*, everything will ultimately be okay and that *with Christ*, one possesses all that they need for their lasting happiness, freedom, and salvation. As Fr. Mike Schmitz defines it, "Joy is the abiding and pervasive sense of well-being." And this deep and abiding sense of the soul comes directly from one's intimate relationship with Christ our Savior—one's *love* for Christ, one's *hope* in Christ, and one's unshakeable confidence in Christ.

The joyful disciple is one who *knows with the greatest certainty* in the *deepest depths* of one's being that *through, with, and in Christ*, I *have all that I need* for my holiness and salvation and *therefore* I am at peace. Furthermore, within the context of Catholic theology, joy is *not circumstantial*, meaning that the possession of joy does not *depend* on one's external circumstances. Rather, one can possess joy *totally independent* of one's circumstances! This means that we can be experiencing the most horrible suffering, pain, and sorrow and *still be joyful*. This means that the world around us might be crashing and

burning and yet we can *still* be joyful *independent* of those circumstances.

This is exactly why in the second reading today, St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, enthusiastically exhorts his audience to “Rejoice in the Lord *always!*” Notice that he *never* says, “Rejoice in the Lord *only* when everything is going well in your life!” Or “Rejoice in the Lord *only* when you get everything that you want!” No, the Apostle to the Gentiles exclaims, “Rejoice in the Lord *always!*” Now obviously, because we’re weak, fallen, and sinful creatures, this is easier said than done. But with God’s grace all things are possible!

So how do we practically “rejoice in the Lord *always*”? Well, we heed the words of St. Paul in the very next sentences of that same letter to the Philippians: “The Lord is near. *Have no anxiety at all*, but in *everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then* the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” In other words, “*don’t worry about anything, pray about everything.*” I think that most of us can agree that 10 days out from Christmas, these

are much-needed words given all the hustle and bustle and man-made stress of this season.

So as one of your spiritual fathers who's primary duty it is to preach the Gospel (and the first person I preach to is myself), I echo the beautiful words of St. Paul and proclaim to you with great enthusiasm: "***Rejoice in the Lord always!***" And brothers and sisters, with our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that He gives us, ***we have every reason to rejoice always!*** With Christ at the center of our lives and reigning supreme in our hearts and minds, we can overcome ***anything*** this fallen world throws at us: we can climb ***any*** mountain, carry ***any*** cross, endure ***any*** suffering, and be victorious ***over*** any problem.

Brothers and sisters, the beauty of discipleship in Christ is that we don't have to depend on the external circumstances of our lives in order to be filled with joy, peace, and hope. Now this doesn't mean that joy requires total neglect and ignorance of the circumstantial realities around us. No, in fact it's just the opposite! Joy is a realistic acknowledgment of the external circumstances around me, knowing that my Christ-centered happiness, peace, and freedom does in no way depend on such

circumstances! Joy is the realistic acknowledgement of one's external circumstances and the ability to rise above them with the necessary help of God's saving grace.

This is why joyful discipleship in Christ translates into great personal freedom in that I don't have to be enslaved to the circumstances of my life or the world around me in order to be happy and at peace. Rather, with my heart and mind firmly anchored in Christ our Savior, I am joyful—I am at peace.

This is why the Church proclaims that *in Jesus*, we have received *every spiritual blessing* in the heavens, *including* a joy that this increasingly secular, hyper-commercialized world cannot take away, no matter how many socioeconomic pressures there are! In fact, in all of the saints, many of whom suffered much more than we ever will, joy is one of the defining characteristics of their lives. *Joy* is the reason why St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr of the early Church in the third century, told his Roman executioners as they were burning him alive on a gridiron, "Now you may turn me over, my body is roasted enough on this side." *Joy* is the reason why men and women like St. Francis of

Assisi and St. Teresa of Calcutta can embrace a life of extreme poverty in order to serve the poorest of the poor, and still possess great peace and happiness. **Joy** is the reason why St. Damien of Molokai left everything he knew and travelled halfway around the world in the 19th century to a small island in the Pacific Ocean that was filled with lepers so that he could serve them and care for them, bringing them the love and mercy of Christ. In the eyes of the world, these saints had nothing, but in the eyes of Heaven they had everything.

Along with charity, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity, **joy** is one of the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit. And brothers and sisters, what is the “Christmas spirit” but the **Holy Spirit** dwelling in our hearts bearing all of these Heavenly fruits? In today’s Gospel, St. John the Baptist proclaims that the Lord Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Therefore as we prepare to worship and receive the Prince of Peace in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us pray, “Come Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit, **the Christmas spirit**, so that I may experience

true and lasting joy—a joy that this world can never give or take away.

Amen.”