

Homily - Advent 3 - Year B - December 17, 2017

“Rejoice always.” What a simple statement Paul makes in today’s second reading to the Thessalonians. Rejoice. Now that word bounces about quite frequently in the days and weeks before Christmas. Rejoice because Christ is born; rejoice because Christ redeems; Those are the true sources for our rejoicing. Sure, we also have great meals, wonderful parties, joy-filled family celebrations; rejoicing because we have found the perfect gifts to give; rejoicing because we made out like bandits at Christmas.

I am sure that Paul had none of this in mind when he exhorted his listeners to rejoice. In fact, this weekend is officially known as *Gaudete* Sunday, Latin for those opening words in Paul’s letter. Even in Isaiah we hear: “he has sent me to bring glad tidings; I rejoice heartily in the Lord; God makes justice and praise spring up before all the nations.”

Rejoicing permeates everywhere we go these days. Even Pope Francis entitled his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* because he wanted to reawaken in us the reality of joy that should highlight our lives, especially our Catholic Christian lives. In his words: “The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to joy.” Isn’t it strange to speak of the cross in terms of joy?

Exhibiting a certain sense of humor, the Holy Father also notes that “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.” Yes, in life suffering exists, wars take place, turmoils change the courses of our lives, pain slows us down, and human relations challenge us when we least expect them. All of this resembles Lent, but, our Christian perspective should remind us that for every crucifixion there is a resurrection. There is light at the end of the tunnel. We believe that light is Jesus Christ whose light allows us to see, experience, taste and enjoy life differently. If we do not, then we have missed the point of our faith.

We have reasons to shout and celebrate joy when we come to celebrate Christmas. The source of our joy is sung in the famous Christmas carol “Joy to the world, the Lord is come....Let every heart prepare room.” Celebrating Christ at Christmas constitutes the only reason to celebrate.

All the parties, the gift-giving, the meals, the family gatherings are all good, but they are better when we remember why we do what we do. Christmas ends on December 26 if we have left out Christ. Christmas joy

and enthusiasm continue way beyond December 25 when we are clear why we celebrate in the first place.

Christmas, the Incarnation of Christ, the coming of him who saves us from sin and from ourselves, gives us the reason to celebrate. Again, in a moment of humor the Holy Father has told us that the “Christian should never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral.” And even more pointedly, Pope Francis tells us that we should not be “sourpusses” in the face of the gospel.

A little known saint, Theophane Venard, spoke of Christian joy and rejoicing in this way: “Be merry, really merry. The life of a true Christian should be perpetual jubilee, a prelude to the festivals of eternity.”

Yes, it is true that God asks everything of us. But at the same time he offers everything to us. The Eucharist is the greatest gift God has given us here on earth because the Eucharist puts us in touch with the true divine. May this and every celebration of the Eucharist help us in our discovery of true joy as we joyfully celebrate the life God has given us.