

Third Sunday of Advent, December 14, 2025

Everyone wants joy. We are hard-wired with that desire. God made us that way. We desire great joy. Not just sporadically, but deep and abiding joy. My question for you today is this: How do you go about pursuing joy in your life? Or what do you look to to give you joy from day to day? Jesus in the Gospel asks the crowds, three times, basically: *“What are you looking for? Why do you go out into the desert? What were you expecting to see?”* We can hear almost those same words addressed to us. *“What are you looking for? What is it that you think will bring you joy in life? What are you going after, pursuing, in hopes of having deep and abiding happiness in life?”*

People, of course, will answer the question in different ways. For some people, it is material or financial prosperity or comfort that they're looking for. If they have that, they can be joyful. For some, it's good health. If only I could be well, then I could be joyful. For others it is having fun. As long as we're having a good time, we are happy. Others may be looking for stability as a source of joy. If the dust would just finally settle, you know, if things would calm down for a while, then there would be happiness. Others are looking for harmony in their family, or even just to see that their children and grandchildren are doing well. That's a criterion for being happy in life. For some it is success in their career, a good crop in farming, a good return on an investment. For others, it might be a good reputation, having a good opinion of other people, or having good relationships with others, to be known as a good person. Others may feel that true happiness will come the more power they have, the greater control they have over things. When things go my way, the way I want them to go, then I can be joyful. But if things don't go

the way I want them to go, then I can't be happy. For some, they will be joyful if their political parties are in power. Or their sports team is winning. Others find joy in not having to deal with people. Or if other people would just do what they are supposed to do, then I can be happy; I would find joy. It is not always self-preferential either, for some it is helping others that gives them joy. They find happiness or even just seeing other people happy gives them a sense of joy. All these things, all these things can bring delight to us in our day-to-day life. But every single thing I mentioned can change in an instant. Health can change, a financial situation can change, relationships with other people can change. It can all change in a flash. And then where are we? If our pursuit of joy is tied up in all of these other things, and then the circumstances change, we might do left feeling there is no joy until the circumstances change again. And then ground falls out from under our feet.

Well, true joy cannot be contingent of the circumstances of life. It cannot depend on that. So, others will say, well then, if you can't count on the circumstances of life to make you happy, then you just have to decide that you're going to be joyful. You just have to choose. I'm going to be happy. That is a step in the right direction, but it's still a flawed understanding of joy because we do not generate our own joy. It's like if you're thirsty, you can't fix that on your own. Not to be gross, but swallowing your own saliva, it's not going to be slay your thirst. Right? You just can't do that. And you can't just decide, I'm not thirsty. We can make a choice to go to the kitchen sink with a glass and fill it with water and drink and quench our thirst but even in that case, we have not quenched our own thirst. I didn't make the water. I may have paid for the water meter, but I didn't make the water. I have found the source. I can quench

my thirst. And so, it is with joy. We don't generate it on ourselves, but we know where to go to get it.

And now I am getting to a true notion of joy - not dependent on the circumstances of life, not something we create on our own - but we do choose to avail ourselves or not. A joy that can be ours all the time. All the time. Wherever we are and whatever is going on. John the Baptist figures prominently in today's Gospel and last week's Gospel. John always pointed to Christ, always pointed to Jesus. Jesus is the source of our joy. And not just Jesus and His abstract, presence out there, but our nearness to Jesus and His nearness to us, that's the source of joy. Not in St. Matthew's Gospel, but in the Gospel of Luke, we hear that in that beautiful event of the Visitation, Mary goes to visit Elizabeth. And at the moment when the sound of Mary's greeting reaches Elizabeth's ears, John the Baptist leaps for joy in her womb. John recognizes the presence of Christ and that brings him joy even as he is not possessing a rational presence yet. He leaps with joy in the presence of the Lord. The presence of the Lord is the source of our joy. So, it's such a relief to know that the circumstances of life do not have to govern the reality of joy in us.

If we're looking to the circumstances of life to determine our experience of joy, we become slaves of those things. We become slaves to them, slaves to work, slaves to money, slaves to power, reputation, to health. God didn't make us to being slaves to those things. He made us for the joy that comes of knowing and loving Him.

I would specify two simple areas in life where we have tremendous opportunities to experience the nearness of the Lord, and to be filled with joy. The first probably comes to us naturally as Catholics: recognizing the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Jesus in the

Blessed Sacrament. Here Jesus is not this abstract reality out there. He is unquestioned love, soul, and divinity - the complete presence of Christ is here in this Sacrament. So, whether we are just walking into the building, or coming to adore him when He is exposed on the altar, visiting Him in the Blessed Sacrament chapel or at the Mass, we are receiving Him into our body, into our heart. This is a special, special gift of Jesus. His presence, His real presence, His true presence, and receiving Him with eagerness, recognizing Him in the Sacrament – this should bring us great joy. It really should. That joy is available to us in this Sacrament if we have eyes to see, if we approach with faith and thirst and hunger in our hearts for Jesus. That's the intuitive one.

The second opportunity for us to enjoy the Lord and receive the joy of His presence is not so intuitive. It's the Cross. The reality of the Cross in our life. The exact thing in fact, that we regard as, maybe with the anthesis of joy in our life. The sufferings we endure, the sufferings of ours. The pains, the grief, the trials, the difficulties, - these things that in our human nature we shun. In the eyes of faith, we see the nearness of the Cross of Christ. And so even in the midst of those things, those difficulties, we find that Jesus is so near. So very, very near. No matter what that Cross entails.

It takes a lot of faith I think to see the Cross from that perspective. But it is true. I am not lying to you. And in the Eucharist and in the concrete Crosses of our day-to-day life, Jesus is there. He is present.

So, it's a good day this day, this joyful Sunday of Advent to take stock of again that question that I asked in the beginning: What am I pursuing? How am I pursuing joy in my life? What are the decisions that I make day-after-day in which I am going after joy, wanting joy?

Where am I looking for it? And then to meet that reality with the truth of the joy that comes from God alone, and the nearness of Christ. Maybe it is an opportunity today to sort of recalibrate, refocus, and redirect that pursuit of joy and like John the Baptist recognizes the nearness of Christ, and leapt for joy, you might just leap a little bit, you might just find something waking up in us. The nearness of Jesus really does bring us the depth and constancy of the joy that we desire so deeply.