

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent, December 14, 2025 – Christian joy, prerogative and obligation

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

My dearly beloved in Our Lord,

The third Sunday of Advent starts with St Paul's words: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God."

This joy which the Church wants us to have, is not primarily that of the end of the penitential season (which Advent also used to be... This week the Ember days are to be observed, and later the Christmas Vigil), but that of encountering Christ: "The Lord is nigh."

The looming destruction of Jerusalem about which Our Lord warned us lately; the constant signs of the impending end of the world as we know it; the precursory signs of each one's demise... none of those seems to be a fitting occasion or incentive to rejoice; no more than our daily trials and crosses! That is because we look at things the wrong way, with our naturalistic and materialistic view, rather than from God's perspective. *The only way we can experience true Christian joy*, no matter what the circumstances of our life may be at a given time, is that we align our views and desires, with God's views and desires.

We do this, for example, when we pose the Act of Faith which, inspired by God, allows Him to grant us the greatest of all benefits, His divine grace: We submit our small, fallible intelligence to God's universal and infallible intelligence. We do not renounce the use of our mind and will when we make an act of Faith, rather we make the best and noblest use of our God-given intelligence. - This is why most "modern people" refuse to believe, because they think they can do whatever they want, without taking into account why, how, or for what end God has made us.

Our Lady summed it up in her words to St Bernadette Soubirous, the seer of Lourdes: "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next."

The reason why there can only be relative, or patchy happiness, joy or peace on this side of eternity, is that the *perfection* of anything good, presupposes that this good cannot be lost any more. But since any good, material or spiritual, can be lost while we are still living in the body, even the greatest joy will not last forever, or be totally perfect. Even the union of the Savior with our soul in Holy Communion is only a transitory union as far as His real presence is concerned. (The grace communicated by the Sacrament, though, is meant to remain in our soul, of course.) The true and perfect Communion will only happen in Heaven, where we cannot lose God's presence again.

Undergoing effort, strain and even pain, is not incompatible with true Christian joy; with joy which is a foretaste of Heaven.

About St Peter the Divine Office says on his feast day (June 29): "This day did he, that holdeth the keys of the kingdom, depart hence with joy to be with Christ." (Ant. ad Magn. in II Vesp.) His brother St Andrew similarly loved and desired the cross which had been prepared to put him to death, and thus to be with Christ.

If we look at Our Lady, or at St Joseph, whom we associate primarily and rightly with the *joyful mysteries*, we see how intertwined joy and sorrow are in their life. The Blessed Virgin receives God's messenger and agrees to God's plan for the Incarnation, knowing fully well what unspeakable suffering the divine maternity would bring on her, our Co-Redemptrix. Soon after the Annunciation she

undertakes a long journey to visit St Elizabeth, all the while experiencing the greatest joy, that of carrying her Creator and Savior under her heart. St Joseph undergoes a true martyrdom in his soul when he realizes that she is with child, but he still keeps doing what he needs to do. When the Angel later enlightens him about the child's divine origin, and his rôle in the work of Redemption, he humbly and joyfully executes his task, thus becoming not only one of the greatest Saints, but even the protector of the entire Church, Christ's mystical body.

Whether we think of holy martyrs, confessors, virgins or other saints – they all went the same way, they all acted in the same manner: Doing God's will which demands the greatest sacrifices, at least at times, while also having their soul filled with the greatest joy and peace. Some martyrs were chanting in the abject prison holes where they had been put, or in the arena awaiting death by wild beasts, or attached to a cross...

St Paul names peace and joy among the 12 fruits of the Holy Ghost. This is because Our Lord speaks the same language, in his last discourses to the Apostles:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you.” (Jn 14:27) “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled.” (Jn 15:11; cf. 16:24, 1Jn 1:4; 2Jn 1:12) If we love God, and we know that in return God loves us – because one cannot happen without the other – then we possess true joy. The more lively our faith in this supernatural relationship between God and our soul becomes, the greater this deep rooted joy becomes:

I am God's child (by adoption);

I am loved by the best of father, our Father in Heaven;

no one, and nothing – except sin – can break this bond because God is faithful;

I am set to go to Heaven if only I persevere in loving and serving God; and to enjoy eternally God, the greatest of all goods, the only true and lasting good!

True joy, Christian joy, is our dear prerogative. It is also an obligation for us, albeit a very sweet one. We should never allow ourselves, or those under our care, to remain sad or depressed. Many times we may not feel like screaming, or dancing with joy – and we do not need to, either! Christian joy is primarily spiritual. It must not be mistaken for sentimental joy, or the affected joy of the modernist charismatics. In spite of the many trials we are facing, we need to train ourselves to be of equal mood, and not to make everyone around us to suffer from “how we feel”. When we are overjoyed, let us remain serene. When we are deeply saddened, or suffering, let us bear it patiently and with resignation. Our pride pushes us to exteriorize anything we experience or feel, but it is not a good thing to give way to pride, especially in this regard. We need to be intent and concentrated on serving God, and not our own small person. Thus, the secret to true joy lies in our will to mortify our own self, as Our Lord tells us to do: “And calling the multitude together with his disciples, he said to them: If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mk 8:34) Expertus potest credere – only the one who has experienced it, can believe this. To our fallen nature it does not make sense.

Let us imitate St John the Baptist. In today's Gospel he professes the truth. He is not the promised Redeemer, but his precursor. He humbles himself profoundly when he says that he is not worthy even to undo Our Lord's shoelaces. A little later he calls himself the friend of the bridegroom, and says that he rejoices in this calling: “A man cannot receive any thing, unless it be given him from heaven. You yourselves do bear me witness, that I said, I am not Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (Jn 3:27-30) He will decrease because he will be beheaded. In this way he will enter into his lord's joy, as Our Lord so often puts it (cf Mt 25:21).

Let us be truly humble, and thus establish ourselves in true joy, that joy which no one can take from us!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.