

Homily: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent: Cycle B: 2023: Is 61:1-2, 10-11; Lk 1:46-48; 1Thes 5: 16-24; Jn 1: 6-8, 19-28

***“Rejoicing in the Lord always - even in the face of many earthly problems, evils & sin”***

1. **Are we a people of joy and anticipation?** Or are we depressed and gloomy most of the time? **Joy** is a lasting fruit of the Holy Spirit and of the infused virtue of hope. It is a sense of interior confidence and contentment, peace and trust in the Blessed Trinity, even amid many external difficulties. It needs to be contrasted with external “happiness” as we usually understand it - which is a fleeting human emotion that often randomly leaves us with no real rhyme or reason. **Authentic Christian joy is one of the most powerful witnesses to the truth of Christianity.** Witness the martyrs going off to their deaths singing songs. Wow! **In contrast,** the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was an atheist, and a strong one at that, said the main reason he didn’t believe in the truth of the Christian message was because *“Christians are the most miserable lot of people I have ever meet; they go around with a gloomy woe is me attitude, and who needs that?”* Was that disposition unique to the mostly Lutheran Christians Nietzsche was dealing with in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany? I think it may apply in a broader context. We all need to work on this. We should be people of joy! The supernatural infused virtue of hope (from which the spiritual fruit of joy flows) which we receive in our Baptism gives us the assurance, if we let it permeate our lives, that Jesus has won the victory over satan, sin and death; and His victory will be revealed in due time - both in our individual lives and in the larger world some day. We are called by the virtue of hope - to be patient and hold out in joy and anticipation of the Lord’s victory being fully manifested; otherwise, our life and the state of this world can get us depressed! **Hope is not mere human optimism** which pretends things are wonderful when they may not be; **hope is realistic:** *things sometimes are very bad in the world and even in our own personal lives, but Jesus WILL win out in the end.* Do we trust this to be the case? And when we feel disheartened and fatigued by the trials and tribulations of life, do we turn to the Lord in prayer, and offer acts of voluntary penance for our sins & in

reparation for the sins of the world, and unite our suffering with Jesus to train our wills to stay focused on God in the tests of life? See our Lady of Sorrows example.

2. St. Paul tells us today in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading to “*rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*” We are to “*test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.*” **This is the new life of the Spirit we are called daily to live, flowing from our Baptism into union with the Blessed Trinity.** The Lord’s way is the better way: the crosses of life lead to the eternal life of the Resurrection - if we unite everything in our life with Jesus. To always live in a spirit of joy, hope and anticipation of the Lord’s eternal victory in our lives; rather than living in gloom, darkness, depression, and without hope - grasping for the passing pleasures of this world – which so many ppl. in the modern world do. **The choice is ours!** To counter Nietzsche’s critique of joyless Christians, we need to remember the Gospel is Good News! Our Lord’s love for us is Good News! Our Lord’s merciful call to repentance and to give up our sins and focus on uniting our lives with His in trusting love is Good News! His coming among us as a little baby to save us from our sins Himself is Good News! As Pope Benedict XVI said, “*We don’t believe in an idea we believe in a Person (Jesus) who is our Savior and who reveals to man what we are called to be in the light of the Triune Love of God.*”
3. Who can help us to live this out well? This call to rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances? **Our Blessed Mother Mary.** Mary embodied this spirit of joy and hope in her Magnificat, which is the responsorial psalm today; it is possibly the most beautiful expression of rejoicing in God in all of the Sacred Scriptures. Ponder it regularly in your heart when you sense the gloom setting in. **Everything is right with God in Heaven, why worry about the passing things of earth?** Let us ask Mary to prepare our hearts and souls for Christmas, to help us make a good Confession if we haven’t done so yet this Advent, and to take to heart John the Baptist’s motto: “He (Jesus) must increase and I must decrease.” The more we attempt to live out that truth, the more we will be filled with the hope and joy of the Holy Spirit, which is a foretaste of the life of Heaven. God bless you.