

DECEMBER 12, 2021
Sunday of the 3rd Week of Advent
Luke 3: 10-18

“BE JOYFUL ALWAYS.”

“A few years ago, The Reader’s Digest reported the story of an attractive and successful business woman who noticed a small bump behind her ear as she was brushing her hair one morning. As the days went on, she noticed that the bump was getting larger, so she decided to see her doctor. Her worst fears were confirmed. The doctor told her that the bump was a large tumor that would require immediate surgery. When she awoke following the surgery, she found her entire head wrapped like that of a mummy. She could see herself in a mirror only through two tiny holes cut into the wrapping. When the bandages were removed after a week, she was shocked to see that her once attractive features had become disfigured by a facial paralysis caused perhaps by damage to facial nerves during the removal of the tumor. Standing before the mirror, she told herself that she had to make a choice whether to laugh or to cry. She decided to laugh. Although the various therapies tried were unsuccessful in improving the facial paralysis, the decision to laugh in the face of adversity allowed this woman to carry on with her life with joy, giving encouragement to those with similar paralysis.”¹

Our entrance antiphon for the 3rd Sunday of Advent must reflect our tone of joy today: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.’ As we know this Sunday is called ‘Gaudete Sunday’ the first word of the Entrance Antiphon in the Latin original, Gaudete (“Rejoice!”). All our readings and even priest’s vestment expresses jubilation and joy. For two weeks priests’ wear violet vestment, a penitential color and today, pinkish color which is officially termed rose.

“In the first reading the prophet Zephaniah invites the Israelites to shout for joy: ‘Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has repealed your

¹ stories4homilies.blogspot.com

sentence. The King of Israel is in your midst; you have nothing to fear.’ The Book of Zephaniah was written around 640 B.C. when Assyrian gods were being worshipped even in Jerusalem. Although most of the Book of Zephaniah is gloomy, here he presented hope, to reside in the remnant of the Jews that would remain faithful. The city and the people are to rejoice because the Lord is coming to save them. Twice he states that despite sad things that are happening, God is in their midst. God is in the midst of our sadness too, and like the people of that time, we must remove our arrogance and pride in order to receive him. To rub it in, the psalmist, despite our fears and weaknesses, cheerily demands that we cry out with joy, that we be confident and unafraid. ‘Sing and shout for joy for great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel.’ St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians asks them to be happy. ‘I want you to be happy in the Lord always. What I want is your happiness.’ He asks them to be unselfish and keep away all worries, for there is no need to worry. Christianity is a religion of Joy and if we are not happy Christians there is something wrong with our faith. Even when there is nothing in particular to rejoice about in our own lives, we can still rejoice that the Lord has been good to our fellow human beings, to our community, to our world. Those who seek will always discover the marvels the Lord has done and is doing for us. We rejoice because the Lord himself rejoices over us. If there is anything that we need we only have to ask the Lord who always answers our prayers. In every situation we should be thankful, in tears as well as in laughter.”²

Like in our story, amidst pain, suffering and difficulties, we are called to be joyful, face all these adversaries and heads up for God is with us and in Him everything is grace and things are all possible. Our faith teaches us to be joyful in all things except sin.

What shall we do as we anticipate the birth of our Lord? St. John the Baptist answered the questions of the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers, and our guide to make us joyful. “He told the people three things: First, every follower of God must share what they possess (their personal goods and resources) with their neighbors, especially with

² ibid

those who lacked the basic necessities of life. John recognized that this was a key duty for every individual and an outward expression of the great commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18). Second, John pointed out the sacred duty to give each and every person what is their due and to not take from them what rightfully belongs to them. God commands that each person be treated with respect and that honor be given where honor is due. John told the tax collectors that they must not coerce people to pay more tax money than what was rightfully due. John instructed soldiers to not abuse their authority or power to compel people to give or do things for them beyond what was rightful and their due. (It was not uncommon for soldiers to abuse their position to force people to carry their heavy equipment for them or to rob them of their goods.) John did not tell them to leave their profession, but to be good, honest, and respectful soldiers. And thirdly, John exhorted his listeners to be content with what they had and to avoid coveting (wrongfully desiring or acquiring) what belonged to others. John basically called the people to turn back to God and to walk in his way of love and righteousness.³ My brothers and sisters, John is telling us today to be generous in giving, truthful in life and serve with love and humility those people God entrusted to us. If we do and follow this, God will reward us and joy will fill our hearts.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, may your light always burn brightly in my life so that I may always be joyful and instrument of joy to others. May the Holy Spirit empower me to be witnesses of the joy of the gospel and point others to Christ, our Savior and ultimate happiness. Amen."

³ www.dailyscripture.net