

3rd Sunday of Advent B

Rejoice Always! (A Homily by Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli)

The Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally called “Gaudete Sunday.” Gaudete is Latin for “REJOICE.” It comes from the first word of the Introit (or the Entrance Antiphon) of the Mass for today, which is taken from the letter to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” (Phil 4/4)

One of the greatest contributions of Christianity is that it brought, “Joy to the world.” “Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her king” says the familiar Christmas song. This is the time to experience true joy. The sound of the word “JOY” may be hard to experience when we are stormed with stormy waves of suffering and temptation. In the midst of a longtime mental or physical illness that debilitates; an infectious and sinful inclination that troubles; the excruciating economic poverty; the family life that is like a boat in the troubled waters; experiences such as these pose a challenge to accept the joy that today’s liturgy offers. But it is time to accept the pure joy of the gospel.

Today’s Scriptures give us four prominent figures as examples of true joy. First we have the prophet Isaiah. Certainly he was in great suffering due to exile in a foreign land. He had the experience of suffering. Through his own experience he prophesied about the Messiah as Suffering Servant of God. Yet, moved by the anointing of the Spirit of the Lord God, he cries out, “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.”

Secondly we have Mary the Mother of Jesus in the responsorial Psalm. She was troubled by the vision of an Angel. As a young innocent teenage girl, she did not grasp the fact of becoming pregnant without even having the pleasure of marital relationship. She knew the threats that awaited her from highly traditional and orthodox community. The man she was betrothed could expose her vulnerability and abandon to her fate. But she left aside for a moment, all of her confusions. She was joyful of her vocation as the mother of the Messiah. She sang, “My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Thirdly we have St. Paul. He mentions in his second letter to the Corinthians, 11/26 that he suffered greatly in his missionary journeys. “On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Yet our second reading from the first Thessalonians presents St. Paul as rejoicing. He says, “REJOICE ALWAYS.”

Finally we have the greatest man on earth, John the Baptist. John found joy in his humility. He said, “I am not worthy to untie his sandals.” He insisted that he was not

the messiah but the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. When Jesus came he pointed to the world that he is the Lamb of God. He said, "There is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me."

This is a story of a little girl who attended a wedding for the first time. She whispered to her mother, "Why is the bride dressed in white?" "Because white is the color of happiness, and today is the happiest of her life," the mother responded. The child thought about it for a moment, then said, "So why is the groom wearing black?"

Smile! Because, it takes only a smile to make a dark day seem bright. Happiest people don't have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything. The joy that the scriptures present is not an instant joy that the world offers. It is a kind of happiness that must be obtained and safeguarded time and again with faith and patience. Let us pray for the joys of so great a salvation. Let us prepare ourselves to celebrate the Lord's Nativity with solemn worship and rejoicing.