

HOMILY 3RD SUN ADVENT YRB 2017

Joy to the world the Lord is come.
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and heaven and nature sing.

I realize that today is not Christmas, but it is Gaudete Sunday, or rejoice Sunday. I have been thinking about Sean. Once a month, I celebrate Mass at Botsford Commons. Sean was one of the residents there. Sean had dementia. Every month when I got there I would say: “Sean, how are you today.” And he would get a big smile on his face and he would say: “You know my name. How do you know my name?” And I would say: “I know you Sean and I am very happy to see you. How are you?” And he would say: “I am great. Jesus loves me. Can we sing Joy to the World?” And every month for two years we sang Joy to the World. Here is Sean, with this severe dementia, filled with Joy because Jesus loves him. If only it were that simple. But maybe it is.

In the first reading we heard: “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks.” How can we rejoice always? Joy comes from within. Happiness comes from outside of us. Depending upon what happens in our environment, happiness comes and goes. Happiness will fail you, but joy will not. I think Sean is right. Joy comes from Jesus. When we think of our faith we have a lot to be joyful about. Jesus has saved us. Jesus loves us in a way that is unending. There is nothing we can do to make Jesus love us any more; there is nothing we can do to make Jesus love us any less. Jesus will love us and care for us for all eternity. Because of our faith we can find meaning in everything that happens in our life. We can even find meaning in the suffering that helps us to go on living.

A couple of examples. I was seeing a woman in spiritual and she was grieving the loss of her 24 year old daughter who died in a car accident. She told me at one point: “I wish I was dead.” This was a

woman of great faith and I understood what she meant. She was not suicidal; She was looking forward to the time when I would be with her daughter again. Her faith told her that they would be together again. She was not happy during this time, but her faith allowed her to feel joy and go on living. My first job out of law school I absolutely hated. I was so disappointed. I had just spent all of this time and money and effort and it did not look like it was going to work out. Sometimes we are robbed of our joy because we do not understand fully what is going on in our lives. We are never going to understand what is going on in our lives totally so we need to let that go. It was at that time that I started thinking about the priesthood. I knew that God would guide me to something else if the law thing was not what I he wanted me to do. I got an attorney job that I liked and then I could leave it and go to seminary. If that first job would have worked out I may not be a priest today, and my priesthood has brought me great joy. I was not happy during these difficult times, but I could still find joy and continue living.

Pray without ceasing. This does not mean that we are to walk around with a Rosary or join a monastery. It means always being mindful of the source of our joy, even in times of pain and suffering. It means that we should always be mindful of the source of our joy. This will help us to go on living. In all circumstances give thanks. Even on days when I am not very happy, I have many things to be grateful for. If I stop and give thanks to God for all of the blessings he has given me, I can avoid having someone or some situation suck all of the joy from my life. I have a lot to be grateful to God for in my life, and I bet you do as well.

I think maybe Sean was on to something. Maybe we should sing Joy to the World every day of our lives. Remember St. Paul's words in the second reading today: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks."