

## **HOMILY**

### **THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

How many of you remember the blackout in August of 2003 that lasted a few days in Michigan? I was a baby priest at the time at my first assignment at Our Lady of Good Council. The day of the blackout, I was planning to have dinner with Fr. John Sullivan, the Pastor I was with there and a couple of other priests. We were gathered at the rectory, and we were going to leave from there to have dinner. We were having fun. We knew the power was out at the Parish, but it was in the afternoon so it did not really affect us. We all got in one car and headed out. The traffic was terrible, and we wondered why. Then we noticed that the traffic lights were out, and a lot of the businesses looked closed. We finally turned on the radio and found out about the extent of the blackout. Just then we saw a Chinese restaurant that looked open. They had gas stoves and were cooking a lot of stir fry, so they were open. We were delighted. We went inside, and we were continuing to have fun. I noticed at the table next to us that they did nothing but complain. They were not cooking what they wanted off the menu, the drinks were not cold enough, the food was not hot enough, the service was too slow, it was too hot in there because the air conditioning was not working and their experience was so bad they did not want to pay for the food. Our environment was the same, but my table had a blast and that table next to ours was miserable.

Today we celebrate Gaudate Sunday. We find joy because Christmas is near. We hear in the Second Reading: *“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* We were created for joy, not for anxiety. We have so much anxiety due to COVID. I want to talk a little today about how to find joy in our lives. I want to make a distinction between happiness and joy. Happiness depends upon our environment. When things happen that we want, we are happy; if not, we are unhappy. Joy comes from within regardless of what is happening in your environment. It is a choice, and Jesus can lead us to joy. He is the way, the truth and the life. During the blackout that day in the restaurant, we were all in the same environment. My table was not going to let the lack of electricity rob us of our joy.

Here are a few things you can do to find joy; and they are all internal, and as it says in the Second Reading, you should take all of them to prayer and ask for Jesus' help. First of all, we are incredibly resilient people. Stuff happens in our lives that we cannot control, but we can change the way we respond to it. If we find a way to recover rapidly from adversity, we will find joy. I

think COVID has shown us how resilient we can be overall. Secondly, we need to examine our outlook on life. Can we see the positive in others? Can we savor positive experiences? Can we see the innate basic goodness in another human being? If so, you can find joy. Third, pay attention to what you are doing at the moment. Research shows that 47% of the time we are not paying attention to what we are doing. We are sleep walking through half of our lives and missing the joy! Fourth, be generous in loving and serving others. Helping someone else will always make you feel joy. My daily prayer helps me to find joy in all of these areas.

Finally, I want to talk about social media. Talk about sucking our joy! I feel like I am always slamming social media, and I guess I am. I am on Instagram because I like to see what our Mary Ann Koelzer posts for St. Edith. She does a fabulous job! But if we start comparing ourselves to what is posted on social media, we will quickly conclude that we are not enough, we are not smart enough, we are not attractive enough, we are not thin enough, we are not successful enough, we are not rich enough. What do people post? On Instagram they suggest to me people I may want to follow, and I know a lot of them. I don't know how they figure that out, but they do. When I look at some of the pictures, I would have never recognized some of them. They look fabulous, but they do not look like that in real life. Of course, if you are going to post a picture of yourself, you will post a flattering one. And this is a post you may see on Facebook. *We had a fabulous family cruise, my son is brilliant and he's on the dean's list, and my daughter is engaged to a millionaire and is planning a fabulous destination wedding.* This is a post you would not see. *We had a miserable family vacation. We fought the whole time. My son is flunking out of college, and my daughter is in rehab for the third time.* That is exaggerated, but you get the point. Don't compare your life to what is posted on social media. It will suck your joy. The power failure of 2003 was just a failure of the electrical system. Social media was not then what it is today. We just went back to normal in a few days. Today, this would have been a plot by the Republicans or by the Democrats to take over the elections, or a plot by a particular country to take over the world, or a sign of the devil, or the end of the world. Without social media, I lived through the blackout, with minor inconveniences, keeping my joy. Do you think it would be the same today? Social media is here to stay, but do not let it rob us of our joy!

Remember Jesus created us for joy not for anxiety. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Follow him.

Love & Peace,  
Fr. Jim