

HOMILY~ THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 14/15, 2024

*Joy to the world, the Lord has 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 am not disoriented. I know it is not Christmas yet. Today is Gaudete Sunday. It is about finding joy. We light the rose candle on the Advent wreath and find the joy that Christmas will be here soon. During Advent, we are preparing to celebrate the first coming of Jesus on Christmas and the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world. We live in the third coming of Jesus, the way he comes into our lives every day. When we find Jesus in the third coming, we find joy.

In the Gospel Reading, John the Baptist is telling the people to prepare the way of the Lord; and the people at that time were asking him what they should do. He tells them to help the people around them. Share your food and clothing with them. If you are cheating people, stop doing that. Do not practice extortion or falsely accuse anyone. He is essentially telling them to treat the people they encounter with love and respect. We need to let Jesus come into all of these encounters.

There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is affected by what is happening in our external world. If things are going well and if we get the things that we want, we are happy. If things are not going so well and if we are not getting the things that we want, we are unhappy. Joy comes from within, so we can find joy regardless of what is happening externally in our lives. Our theme for Advent this year is **“Make Personal Connections.”** I am going to suggest to you that joy comes from our relationship with God and our personal connections with people.

I talk often about repairing relationships with close friends and family because I think this is very important, but sometimes it is just not possible. Forgiveness is something you can do on your own, but reconciliation takes two people. Sometimes the best you can do is leave the door open if they want to reconcile in the future. The personal connections I want to talk about today are with people that are not close friends or family.

Several months ago, I was at the dentist office in the waiting room. There were two young women there, in their 20's; and of course, they were both on their phones. Normally, I would just sit in silence; but I decided to see if I could start a conversation with them. They both put down their phones and continued the conversation. I was wearing my collar, and we had a great conversation about the Catholic Church. I think maybe I was able to put a positive face on the Church in that brief conversation. That brought me joy.

Try it when you are waiting in a waiting room or waiting in line some place instead of looking at your phone. How about the wait staff at restaurants. If the food is not right, they take the complaints and probably pay with their tip; but they did not do the cooking. They work very hard. Leave a big tip, and tell them they did a good job. It will bring you joy. What about our essential workers and our healthcare heroes during COVID? How are we connecting with them? Maybe we need a reminder of how important they are in our lives.

In connecting with people in my life every day, I constantly remind myself not to sweat the small stuff. Sometimes we allow little things that will not matter to poison our personal connections. Ask yourself, *is this going to matter next week, tomorrow, in ten minutes?* Don't sweat the small stuff. That will rob you of your joy.

I really encourage you to make personal connections with people at Church. You probably sit in the same seat every week. Talk to the people around you before or after Mass. Stay for the hospitality after. I am noticing people that did not know each other several months ago are now sitting together every week at coffee and donuts. People that do service projects or volunteer together now have a group of Church friends. Frequently this includes people that are different from you that you never would have connected with otherwise. These diverse personal connections enrich our lives and bring us joy. I get to make personal connections with hundreds of people after Mass, and those connections bring me great joy.

Do not forget to make a personal connection with God every day. I have been ending my prayer time every day asking Jesus, *"What do you want me to do today?"* And, if I do it, it brings me joy.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim