



This Third Sunday of Advent is called, Gaudete Sunday. “Gaudete” means to be glad or to rejoice. Today’s liturgy is marked with an ambiance of joy—the joy that only God can give, the joy that the world cannot take away. In the Second Reading St. Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit exhorts us:

“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes 5).

This short statement raises three thought-provoking questions: 1) How can we “rejoice always”? 2) How can we “pray without ceasing”? 3) How can we give thanks in “all circumstances”?

Firstly, how can we rejoice always? What about Mary at the foot of the Cross, or Jesus on the Cross, were they rejoicing? In the common usage of the term “rejoicing” we would have to answer: no, they were suffering and sorrowful. But there is a deeper kind of joy that is not incompatible with sorrow. This joy is a gift from God and a participation in Jesus’ own joy! Jesus said, “**I have told you**

this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). St. Paul also references this supernatural form of joy: “**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”** (Rom 15:13). Also in the First Reading, Isaiah says: “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, **in my God is the joy of my soul.**” In conclusion, yes, Mary at the foot of the Cross amidst all her suffering still possessed the joy that is rooted in being aware of the goodness of God Himself; she never despaired but maintained the joy rooted “in believing”; she could still say, “In my God is the joy of my soul.” The fact is, no matter what happens to us in this life, God remains infinite Goodness, infinite Love, infinite Peace and Joy. In Him, we can in fact “rejoice always!”

Secondly, how can we pray without ceasing? To do this we must live in dialogue with God. We recognize there are no accidents. We interpret all events of our life – the good, the bad, and the ugly – in reference to God. Everything enters into our prayer, our dialogue, with the ever-present God.

REJOICE ALWAYS. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES GIVE THANKS, FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS.

Thirdly, how can we give thanks in all circumstances? In a word, we believe what God has revealed: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rm 8:28). Seriously? Yes! These words are terribly and wonderfully concise – volumes have been written to explain them, yet, in the end, they remain absolutely true! Is this not a cause for joy, hope, and peace, for those who have ears to hear?

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples

P.S. Words of inspiration which have welled up in the hearts of some folks who had ears to hear:

“Our joy is being close to God ... to be in friendship with God ... This joy does not consist in an absence of pain or sorrow, but rather in a presence, the presence of God.” Dostoevsky.

“O Christ Jesus when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of your presence, your love and your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us, for, living close to you, we shall see your hand, your purpose, your will through all things.” St. Ignatius of Loyola’s prayer against depression.

“What our time is lacking is not so much the capacity to mourn as the capacity to rejoice.... The world needs people who discover the good, who rejoice in it and thereby derive the impetus and courage to do good.... we have a new need for that primordial trust which ultimately only faith can give. That the world is basically good, that God is there and is good. That it is good to live and to be a human being. This results, then, in the courage to rejoice, which in turn becomes commitment to making sure that other people too can rejoice and receive good news.” Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, p. 36.