

HOMILY
December 10, 2006
The Third Sunday of Advent

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Bill Adler wrote a book that consisted of children's letters to Santa Claus. Here are some of the letters:

Dear Santa,

*Last year you didn't leave me anything good.
The year before last year, you didn't leave me
anything good. This year is your last chance.*

Alfred

Dear Santa,

*My brother would like a cowboy suit. Do you
have one with diapers?*

Andy

Dear Santa,

*In my house there are three boys. Richard is two.
Jeffery is four. Norman is seven. Richard is good
sometimes. Jeffery is good sometimes. Norman is
good all the time.*

Norman

One comedian claims his wife hasn't spoken to him since last Christmas. "I asked her what she wanted for Christmas," he explains. "And she said, 'Just surprise me.' So at three o'clock Christmas morning I leaned over and went boo!"

In my ministry, I have heard people agonize over God's will for their life. Is this God's will for me? Is that God's will for me? Did such-and-such happen because of God's will? Would you like to know what is God's will for you? It's right here in God's word:

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again. Rejoice!*

God's will is for you to be joyful.

The other day I read about a community in Idaho that requires its citizens always to appear to be happy when seen in public places. Maybe we need a rule like that in church. It is God's will for us to be joyful. I once heard about a man from Louisville, Kentucky who had to travel to St. Louis on business. This was years ago when Christian people still kept Sunday as a very special day. For this man, "Keeping the Sabbath," meant not riding the trains on Sunday. Thus, after he finished his business late Saturday night, he had to stay over in St. Louis until the following Monday morning.

On Sunday morning he left the hotel looking for a place to worship. The streets were quite deserted, but he finally saw a policeman and asked him for directions to the nearest Protestant church. The stranger thanked the policeman for the information and was about to walk off when he turned and asked the policeman, "Why have you recommended that particular church? There must have been several churches nearby that you could have recommended?" The policeman smiled and replied, "I'm not a church man myself, but the people who come out of that church are the happiest looking church people in St. Louis. I thought that would be the kind of church you would like to attend."

You and I can relate to that, can't we? Who doesn't want to be around happy people? This is the great secret that many of us have hidden from the world. God's will is for us to be joyful. Don't you think that people would be drawn to this church if we got the reputation as being the happiest-looking people in town? One thing many of us have forgotten in our Christian pilgrimage is the duty to be joyful. Maybe it is the innate joyfulness of children that caused Jesus to use a little child as the sole

embodiment of the Kingdom of God. As long as children feel loved, their joy is evident, even in the worst situations. For those of us who are adults, one of the things that make Christmas so joyful is seeing the wide-eyed expressions of wonder on little faces. Children know about joy. Many of us could learn from the children. God's will for each of us this Christmas season is joy.

Closer to home, if your heart is aching this Advent season for any reason—the loss of love in a marriage, the memory of someone you love who is now with God, concern about a teenage child, concerns about your health, concerns about your job—don't let despair defeat you. Many of those things are out of our control. Give yourself a gift. Find some way this special season to defeat the blues. Join a group that is singing carols. Work in the soup kitchen. Think of shut-ins who have no one to care about them. Do something positive, something heartwarming, something that will bring someone else joy. For joy has a way of boomeranging and giving the person who gives it more joy than the one who receives it.