

***The Third Sunday of Advent  
Homily ~ December 11, 2011***

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Blessed Sacrament***

Today we mark the third week of Advent. Advent is half way over. We're half way there. To cheer our spirits, we borrow a dose of Christmas white and mix it with the dark purple of Advent and we come up with pink!

To go along with our celebration, St. Paul tells us, "*Rejoice always.*" It doesn't say "Rejoice sometimes." It doesn't say "Rejoice when times are good and the economy is strong." It doesn't even say, "Rejoice during the Advent-Christmas season." Rejoice always.

Theologian Marcus Borg notes that in English the words "joy" and "jewel" come from the same root word. Like a jewel, joy is of great value and beauty and greatly prized. However, unlike a jewel, it can neither be purchased nor possessed. It is a gift. We cannot make joy happen and we cannot own it. As the Apostle Paul says, it is one of the primary gifts of the spirit. Joy comes from God. Joy is God's will for us.

There is a story in Boswell's "Life of Johnson." Johnson met a man called Edwards who had been at college with him and whom he had not seen for forty years. They went to Johnson's room and talked of many things, telling of what he had done since they had been to college together. Edwards said, "You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson. I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher, but I don't know how. Cheerfulness was always breaking in."

Many people rob themselves of joy because they think that they have to fully understand life. Let me assure you that will never happen. That's what it means to live by Faith. We don't understand everything that happens in life, but we know the Creator of the universe loves us. The Baby of Bethlehem reminds us of that.

Joy does not come from having life figured out. Neither does it come always from living in the sunshine. C. S. Lewis used to talk about the difference between joy and pleasure. Joy comes from within. It is steady and abiding. Joy resides within and endures regardless of what is happening on the outside. It is the gift of God that comes with faith in Jesus.

Joy is not only the privilege but also the responsibility of a Christian. It is our witness to the world that God is alive.

A French philosopher once said, "I look at the Christians or those who call themselves such. They look so morbid and sad. If that's Christianity, I'll have no part of it."

If we personally know Christ as our Redeemer, if we know that God loves us, if we know that our life has meaning and purpose and that we have a friend who will stand with us through eternity, how can we not feel a sense of joy? Rejoice always.

In order to rejoice always, to let joy enter in, Paul reminds us that we also need to pray continually. He's calling us to cultivate a sense of God's presence within us; for if we have a sense of God's presence in our lives at all times, we will be able to rejoice.

Live in God's presence. Let God's spirit fill us so that every moment is touched by God's glory and love.

Journalist Skip Thurman told of meeting a remarkable Washington, D.C. cabdriver named Percival Bryan. Bryan came to the United States in 1924 as a stowaway on a banana boat from Jamaica. For decades, Bryan drove all kinds of ordinary and famous people in his cab. While driving them, Bryan had the habit of asking passengers to sign a guest book. After more than 50 years, eight cabs, and carrying hundreds of thousands of passengers, Percival Bryan's autograph collection has been put on display in the Smithsonian Institute. It contains the names of presidents, jazz greats, senators, scientists, and everyday people. Mostly everyday people.

Bryan was remarkable for his friendliness and poise. One night two young white men robbed him. But before the ride was over, not only had they given back the money, they had both signed the book.

What kept Bryan going? He told Thurman his priorities. Every morning he got down on his knees and had his little prayers. He asked God to go with him, protect him, ride with him, and take his eyesight, his nose, and especially his mouth and share it with others.

He didn't have much money in his pocket, but inside he had felt like he had done his best and God had given him the strength and the wisdom to keep going.

Cabby Percival Bryan is with God now, but his autograph collection in the Smithsonian speaks of a man who knew how to rejoice always and to pray continually. God rode with him in his cab. God was the major influence on how he conducted his life. His life was continuous prayer and joy was his constant companion. God was with him always.

We could all learn from Percival. And if we don't have joy in our life already, ask for it. May we also cultivate a sense of God's presence and carry it wherever God takes us this day.

*St. John the Evangelist*

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