

## HOMILY

### *The Third Sunday of Advent* December 14, 2008

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Bill Adler once 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 baby brother would like a cowboy suit. Do you have one with diapers?

Audrey

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.

(Signed) Norman

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 God's will is for you? I can tell you what God's will is for your life. It is right here in today's reading from Thessalonians. Paul writes:

*“Brothers and Sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”*

God’s will for you and me is to be joyful! There is a community in Idaho that requires its citizens always to appear to be happy when seen in public places. Rexburg, Idaho, retains an old ordinance prohibiting local citizens from walking down the street while “looking gloomy.” Maybe we need a rule like that in church. God’s will for us is to be joyful. Don’t you think that people would be drawn to this church if we got the reputation of being the happiest looking people in town?

Recently a group of Salvadorans fled from their village and across the Lempa River to Honduras. Many people died in the crossing. But the refugees began to build a camp. The first task was to form three committees: a construction committee, an education committee, and the *comite de alegra*—the committee of joy. Celebration was as basic to the life of the refugees as digging latrines and teaching their children to read. Even in exile, they remembered to build and to plant and to dance.

It doesn’t take a degree in economics to know that we are in the midst of extremely difficult and challenging times. Who couldn’t feel a sense of alarm when all the experts are saying that our systems are failing. Hearing all the bad news, we are naturally inclined to shrink back, to retreat, to withdraw and clutch what we have. We worry about our savings, our jobs, our future. Our questions are “What will happen to me? What will happen to us?”

As we look for ways to survive these challenging times, we need to remember that, as Christians, we are called to be witnesses of the goodness of God in our lives. No matter how frightening the nightly business report nor how difficult the situation, money or material things are not the most important part of our lives, God’s grace is. So how can we live abundantly even in these difficult times? What does abundant living mean to you? Buying a new car every year? Wearing the latest fashions? Those things are nice, but they aren’t real abundance.

Real abundance isn't having all you *want* but having all you *need* to fulfill *God's will* in your life. That's why the saints, in the midst of material deprivations and suffering, could call themselves richly blessed. They understood that real

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abundance is measured by intangibles—love, caring, sharing, self-worth, happiness and hope. God's blessings will not be stinted, even in the midst of troubled times. By being thankful for what we have, no matter how much or how little, we affirm to ourselves and to others that God is providing for us. Instead of turning on the TV and being bombarded by more things to be afraid of, take time this week to list all the things you are grateful for. Do you have enough food to eat right now? Do you have a roof over your head? Do you have clothes on your back right now? Then give thanks. As Jesus says, "*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.*"

Paul says to pray without ceasing. Didn't Jesus tell us to ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you?

Remember, if you are in a difficult situation, ask God for help. Ask him to help you find a source of income, a way to pay your bills, a means to provide for your family. Ask and then look confidently for his answer. After all, God has promised to be with us always, not just at Christmas but even unto the end of the ages.



