

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
Zeph 3:14-18a; Is 12; Phil 4:4-7; Lk 3:10-18  
December 12, 2021  
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On this Third Sunday of Advent, we light the rose colored candle of the Advent wreath, to lighten the mood a bit from our focus on penance to the joy of expectation, as we approach the great feast of Christmas. And so, the theme in the prayer of the Church each year on the Third Sunday of Advent is joy.

Joy is one of the effects and results of a genuine Christian faith. In fact, it is the sign of a true Christian, a true disciple of Christ. This means that if joy is lacking in our lives it might mean that there is something lacking in our faith.

Joy is something much deeper than the happiness or pleasure we feel when things are going well here in this earthly life. Joy is not the same as temporary happiness or pleasure. Joy is a lasting gladness that is felt deep down in the soul, and it comes from the anticipation and expectation of something wonderful and beautiful. What gives joy to the soul of a Christian is the hope of Heaven and eternal life with God. Because we believe that Christ is the Savior of the world and that He died for the forgiveness of our sins, we can be joyful from knowing that eternal life awaits us, if we are faithful to Christ. A faithful Christian knows that he or she is on the road to Heaven, and *this* is what gives joy to the soul.

The Sacred Scriptures tell us that we should be filled with joy at the thought of the Lord. In the first reading, from the Old Testament, we heard the words of the prophet Zephaniah: *“Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ... The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior.”* And then in the second reading, from the New Testament, we heard the words of St. Paul, from his letter to the Philippians: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! ... The Lord is near.”* It is the thought of what Our Lord did for us that gives us joy, no matter what is happening to us here and now in this earthly life that is always full of trials and challenges.

As we get closer to the celebration of Christmas, the Church invites us to be joyful and to think about the importance of joy in our souls and in our lives. Christmas makes us joyful because we know that God’s plan for our redemption began with the birth of Christ. It was only because God was born among us as a true man that He was able to die for us on the Cross and reconcile us with God.

When Christ was born at Christmas, the great work of our redemption was begun, and God fulfilled His promise to send a Savior into the world. This is why our faith in what happened at Christmas gives us such joy – the little baby in the manger was God come to save His people.

But the task for us, as Christians, is to sustain this joy in our souls at all times and throughout the year, and not just at happy times like Christmas, when we hear beautiful songs full of emotion and see the world decorated with beautiful lights. These things *do* help to give us joy, but our joy should be rooted in our faith and our love for Christ, which should be felt intensely in our hearts and our souls throughout the year and throughout our lives.

It's a beautiful thing when we meet a person of real joy. There's something very attractive about such people. We often notice that their whole character is colored by their joy, and we also notice something else about them. They may at times experience sorrows, like we all do, but they do not let their sorrows rob them of joy. They remain joyful even in the midst of their sorrows, because their joy is rooted in Christ and their hope for eternal life. We see this in some very heroic souls who endure great suffering from illness or tragedy and yet do not lose their overriding joy. Sorrows don't seem to have the same power or effect on them. They remain joyful because they know that nothing that happens here can change the fact that Christ has redeemed us and offers us eternal life, if we are faithful to Him.

Each of us should take a good inventory of our own joy. We should ask ourselves how often we feel joyful, and then ask ourselves what it is that gives us joy. Would others who know us well describe us as a joyful person? There's no question that we might from time to time experience the sorrows and frustrations that come from the trials and challenges of life. But, is our joy still there in the background? Or, do we allow the troubles of life to cancel our joy? And, if we are not as joyful as we should be, could it be because we don't give enough attention to our faith and the Lord's promise of eternal life? If we're not as joyful as we want to be, could it be because we don't spend enough time in prayer, focusing on the Lord and His promises?

This holy season of Advent is a great time to focus on increasing the joy in our hearts, but our joy should always be rooted in our faith in Christ, whose birth we prepare to celebrate very soon.