

3rd Sunday Advent Year “A”
December 10-11, 2022

“Advent Joy and Anticipation”

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Both in Advent and in Lent, one Sunday is set aside to allow for a more pronounced rejoicing in the midst of spiritual preparation. In Lent we rejoice because we are halfway through our difficult penances, while in Advent we recall the reason for our joy in the more imminent coming of the Savior. Today, a big part of that is our anticipation of Christmas joy. Still, shadows also appear this time of year that can rob us of this joy.

In a blink of an eye, you can exit a relationship without ever having to give an explanation. In a world of ghosting, Facebook defriending, and people tracking likes and dislikes, our joy can be choked off through the actions of another! When a friend or neighbor suddenly cuts off all social communication, it is painful. For those in recovery, they may well need to break off old relationships that were unhealthy. For others, it is an easy way to exit a relationship without any need to explain oneself. This “ghosting” behavior can leave others with some deep wounds.

Life may lead us into a dry period where our efforts have not borne the fruit we were hoping. But just as quickly, we are told of a future that will transform the present. Today’s passage from Isaiah invites us to hope that what is taking place can give way to something better. “The desert and the parched land will exult. The steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers and rejoice with joyful song.” Yet, there may be periods in our life where we have effectively “ghosted” the Lord.

During periods in our life where uncertainty or spiritual dryness rules the day, we need to turn to the Lord, not from Him. Remember that God will never break off the relationship with us. It is we who alter our relationship with God. Our psalm teaches us that it is the Lord who raises up those who were bowed down; it is He who keeps the faith forever. Today is a good day to take our own pulse about our joy.

Amid the daily challenges of school, work or family life, today’s Gaudete Sunday speaks to the primacy of joy as a deliberate choice. We are not

powerless. At some point in our lives, we all come to a stark realization that, depending upon your perspective, is good or bad news. And it is this- one who is most responsible for your happiness is you!

St. Jose Maria Escriva offers us practical guidance today. About joy, he wrote: “For a Christian, joy is a treasure. Only by offending God do we lose it, because sin is the fruit of selfishness, and selfishness is the root of sadness.”¹ His book “The Way” fits nicely into a bedside table drawer. He notes: “You are unhappy? Think: there must be an obstacle between God and me. You will seldom be wrong.”² If so, what is that obstacle?

December can be an extremely challenging month, as some see obstacles to joy. Everyone around them appears to be festive, yet they are not feeling it. They may be on the heels of a broken friendship, mourning the loss of a loved one, or unhappy in school or at work. These factors coalesce into resentment because others around us *seem* to be happy.

However, the source of our joy is not in anything that we have. It lies in “Emmanuel,” the name which means “God is with us” (cf. Matt. 1:23). To be honest, I have begun to realize that joy is a choice that no one can make it for me. During the season of Advent, our Savior remains hidden. He is on the way, but not yet here; the key figure in the creche is missing!

Today’s we receive a momentary glimpse, encouraging us amid the stillness of waiting. We illustrate this with the rich color of Rose, the flowers on the altar, the texts of the liturgy and prayers. The beauty of the sacred liturgy leads us to the Truth of the one for whom we are waiting. And what is this truth? Namely that God is coming to save us, and for this reason we wait in joyful expectation, knowing that our salvation is near at hand.

¹ St. Josemaria Escriva, “*Christ is Passing By*”, n. 178

² St. Josemaria Escriva, “*The Way*”, n. 662