

Meditations: Sunday of the Third Week in Advent (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on this Sunday in Advent.

- A Christian's joy is born from being close to God
- Fruits of joy in the soul
- Precursors of God's grace, like John the Baptist

“REJOICE, Jerusalem, with great joy, because your Savior will come.”^[1]
Today the Church looks forward to the joy of Christmas and insistently

recalls Saint Paul's recommendation: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The Lord is at hand* (Phil 4:4-5). These words, addressed to the church at Philippi, are a summary of the liturgy for this Third Sunday of Advent, known as *Gaudete* Sunday because of the first word in the liturgical celebration: *Gaudete*, rejoice! The word of God and the proper texts for today's Mass are permeated with the joy that springs from our Saviour's nearness. In the opening prayer of the Mass, we ask God to grant us "a new heart and a great joy."^[2] Moreover, for the same reason, whenever possible the liturgical color for this day is rose.

Philippi's Christian community brought Saint Paul deep joy, since it stood out for its great fidelity to our Lord. He addressed them with affectionate words filled with hope. This is truly admirable if we bear in mind that Saint Paul is writing to

them from prison, in chains because of his love for Christ. *The Lord is at hand* (*Phil 4:5*), he encourages them. Certainly the circumstances in which we live, although sometimes difficult or painful, are not an insurmountable obstacle to true joy. Our Lord is always at our side with his loving providence. Those early Christians, confronting a hostile environment, learned to place their hope in Christ. “This is the difference between us and those who do not know God,” Saint Cyprian said. “In adversity they complain and murmur, while adverse events do not separate us from virtue or true faith. On the contrary, these are strengthened through suffering.”^[3]

The joy to which the word of God invites us is not a sweet optimism. It is something much more solid, with deep roots. It is a joy built on the certainty that, while we await his coming, our Lord is here at our side,

lovingly watching over his people. He knows better than we do what we need and He is ready to assist us. And once again He tells us: *do not be afraid* (Is 35:4).

I OVERFLOW with joy in the Lord, and my soul rejoices in my God, because he has clothed me with the robe of salvation, he has wrapped me with the mantle of righteousness (Is 61:10). In the first reading of today's Mass, the prophet Isiah reminds us that the joy of a person with faith comes primarily from what God does for us. The root of inner joy is not the result of our personal effort to do things well, although this undoubtedly also brings joy. But more deeply, "joy is a consequence of divine filiation, of knowing we are loved by our Father God, who welcomes us and always forgives

us.”^[4] Thus a hope is born in our hearts that enlightens our path, because we trust in the power of our Lord. We know that the Saviour is about to arrive, and will never fail us.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth (Is 61:11). Joy is born from a life made rich by God’s love, which leads to a healthy self-forgetfulness, and facilitates a refined dedication to our Lord and to our brothers and sisters. All of this leaves a deep furrow of peace in our lives. “My children, you should be happy,” Saint Josemaria encouraged us. “I am, although I shouldn’t be, in view of my poor life. But I am happy, because I see that God seeks us out once more, that He continues being our Father. And I know that you and I will see what needs to be uprooted

in our life, and we will uproot it with determination; what things need to be burned, and we will burn them; what needs to be given up and we will give them up.”^[5]

As the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence and action in the soul, we will experience this joy habitually in our lives. “How many obstacles vanish when in our hearts we place ourselves next to this God of ours, who never abandons us! Jesus’ love for his own, for the sick and for the lame, is renewed, expressed in different ways. ‘What is the matter?’ he asks, and we reply, ‘It’s my...’ At once there is light, or at least the acceptance of his will, and inner peace.”^[6]

THERE WAS a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for

testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him (Jn 1:6-7). Withdrawing to the desert, John preaches by the Jordan. He impresses the people with his words and his life, so much so that they raise the question of whether he might be the long-awaited Messiah (cf. *Lk 3:15-17*). John denies this and makes known his own mission: he is *the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*, as the prophet Isaiah had announced (*Is 40:3*). John's words and his transformed life are a luminous sign of the Saviour's imminent arrival.

“We can ask ourselves: what gave birth to this life, to this interiority so strong, so upright, so consistent, spent so totally for God in preparing the way for Jesus? The answer is simple: it was born from the relationship with God, from prayer, which was the thread that guided

him throughout his existence.”^[7] Heeding the message of the Baptist, we realize that we too can show, with the example of our lives enriched by the Gospel, that our Lord’s arrival is near. We are thus a voice announcing Jesus to those around us, in our family, in our work. We can truly be, like John the Baptist, precursors of God’s grace.

Our Lady is *causa nostrae laetitiae*, and always brings us joy. We ask her to help us to prepare the way of the Lord for those around us. “We have to fill the world with light, because ours must be a service carried out with joy. So that wherever a child of God in his Work is present there should not be lacking this good humor, which is the fruit of inner peace. Of inner peace and self-giving: giving oneself in the service of others is so effective that God rewards it with a humility filled with spiritual joy.”^[8]

^[1] Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of Sunday III of Advent, ant. I.

^[2] Collect prayer for the Third Sunday of Advent.

^[3] Saint Cyprian, *De mortalitate*, 13.

^[4] Saint Josemaria, Notes from a family gathering, 12 November 1961.

^[5] Saint Josemaria, Letter, 24 March 1931, no. 62.

^[6] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 249.

^[7] Benedict XVI, General Audience, 29 August 2012.

^[8] Saint Josemaria, Letter, 24 March 1930, no. 22.

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