

Meditations: Sunday of the Third Week of Advent (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 3rd week of Advent.

- True joy comes from Jesus
- Humility of John the Baptist
- Small acts of service to sow peace and joy

“REJOICE in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice. The Lord is

near” (*Phil 4:4-5*). In the Church’s liturgy, the third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete Sunday*, or “Rejoice Sunday,” and we are invited to reflect on the source of our joy. Deep in our souls, we all long to be happy. However, sometimes we seek this joy only in partial aspects of our lives: in possessing certain material goods, in the social recognition we receive, in acquiring some skill, or in a peaceful family life. All of this is good undoubtedly, but Saint Paul reminds us that these joys only reach their fullness when they are rooted in the happiness that Jesus gives us: “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

The prophet Isaiah strongly urged his people to live with joy, despite the snares set by their enemies or the many times they have strayed from their God: “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,

and rejoice with joy and singing” (*Isaiah* 35:1). We too, even when temptations arise or weariness comes, can keep that joy deep in our hearts. And this possibility, thanks to the closeness of Christ, is what we celebrate at Christmas.

Joy “is the breath, the way of expressing oneself as a Christian.”^[1] — Just as breathing is the first manifestation of life, sincere joy is a manifestation that Jesus offers an authentic response to the deepest longings of our heart. The prophet Isaiah continues in today’s first reading: “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, fear not!’” (*Isaiah* 35:3-4). God, in a surprising way, shows more joy for the approach of Christmas than we do: such is his longing to find a place in our lives.

JOHN THE BAPTIST accompanies us for much of Advent. We see embodied in him a virtue indispensable for experiencing that lasting joy: humility. His entire life was dedicated to preparing humanity for the coming of the Messiah. When he was in prison and heard about the miracles worked by Christ, he sent his disciples to ask Him, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (*Mt 11:3*). Jesus responded with words of praise for his cousin: “This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.’ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist.” (*Mt 11:10-11*).

Humility helps us to direct our life towards God’s greatness. Pride, in

contrast, “doesn’t believe it’s possible God is so great that He can make himself small, that He can truly draw near to us.”^[2] But those who are humble, without denying their own talents or losing the motivation to work as well as possible, find their joy in bowing before a Child, as the Magi and the shepherds did.

The virtue of humility teaches us that the only truly important judgment is that of a God who reveals himself to us in the face of a child. Each time we draw near, through prayer, to the immense love of Jesus, we free ourselves from judgments about ourselves, which often don’t correspond to reality and ultimately rob us of our peace. We discover that God loves us not for what we do or fail to do, but for who we are: his children. And He also helps us not to judge others. In Bethlehem, we can learn to look upon others with

humility, so that we become a source of peace and joy for those around us.

SAINT JOSEMARÍA summed up the work of an apostle as “sowing peace and joy.”^[3] The humility of knowing we are sowers of the great news that comes from God will lead us to never tire of spreading the Gospel. Often, our smile in the face of adversity will be all that is needed; at other times, it will be the understanding we show towards the problem of someone we love “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”^[4] —

Our Christian witness is not directed against anything or anyone, but is a

manifestation of the humility of a God who chose to become man so that all men and women might find Him. As his humble disciples, we want to contribute to that proclamation. Each of our acts of kindness can be a source and renewal of joy for those around us. Jesus wants to be born in others through our small deeds of love.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is *causa nostrae laetitiae*, cause of our joy. Our Lady always brings us joy. We can ask her that, like John the Baptist, we may know how to prepare the way of the Lord. Saint Josemaria told us that “we need to fill the world with light, because ours must be a service done with joy. Wherever there is a child of God in his Work, this cheerfulness should never be lacking, which is the fruit of interior peace: of interior peace and of self-giving. Giving oneself in the service of others is so effective that

God rewards it with a humility filled with spiritual joy.”^[5]

^[1] Francis, Homily, 28 May 2018.

^[2] Benedict XVI, Homily, 6 January 2010.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 120.

^[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 1.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *Letter 24*, March 1930, no. 22.

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(03/25/2026)