

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, December 12, 2021
Third Sunday of Advent
Cycle C

I was called to administer the Last Sacraments to a “dying lady” – that is how she was described to me by her son. I was told that the person I was going to anoint is terminally ill and was already in her last days. So, I was expecting to see someone who was in anguish, with pain and suffering shown in her face. But I was greatly surprised when I saw a beautiful woman. Her face was radiant and looked as if she had just redone her makeup. I was thinking: nobody could look that good while being so sick.

She died the following day. I wondered what she had in her life that could have made her so peaceful and calm. I will never forget the radiance of her face: it reflected God’s presence. She had the joy of the Lord. This is what her son said during the wake: “She knew that no matter what her circumstances were and even in the face of death, she had something eternal that no one or nothing could take away.” “She has a joy that is radiant and infectious.”

I saw that radiant joy in her even in that condition. St. Augustine defines joy as a “song of the soul.” Augustine is saying something fundamental to our faith: “Joy comes when we transcend our human nature and find ourselves in the presence of God.” While Polish writer Irma Zaleski comments, “Joy is the inner experience of the presence of God.” Zaleski also says that the presence of God can be found in all truth, beauty and love. God is love, and love is the source of joy.

Today is Gaudete Sunday, Sunday of Rejoicing. Gaudete is a Latin word which means “Rejoice!” And it is in the imperative mood – it is a command. St. Paul, in today’s second reading, exhorts us, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!” As we approach Christmas, we are told to rejoice, to be happy and joyful. We must find the reason for our happiness and joy. One thing many people have forgotten or taken for granted in their Christian journey is the duty to be joyful. That is why St. Paul, in today’s second reading, exhorts us, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” We should rejoice because “the Lord is near.” And Paul goes on to say, “Have no anxiety at all...” We should be glad and joyful not because everything is going well with us, not because our health and finances have been great, not even because conditions and circumstances are ideal, but simply because “the Lord is near.”

Joy does not depend on the ups and downs of the circumstances of our lives.
It does not depend on the amount of our money or possessions;
it does not depend on the status of our career;
it does not depend on how much we accomplish;
it does not depend on successes and failures;
it does not depend on the things that we receive or do not receive.

Joyful people choose to count their blessings rather than list their disappointments. Joy is not the same as happiness. Again, joy comes from the knowledge of God's love for us and from the experience of God's presence. Happiness, in contrast to joy, comes from our circumstances. Happiness comes from our ability to have the things we want, achieve the things we desire, and things that happen according to our plan. Sadness comes from not having these things that bring happiness.

Joy comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. The ultimate reason for our joy is our conviction that God loves us forever and without conditions. If we live by this truth, if we accept this love, we will have a future of indescribable happiness and joy. To be joyful is a choice that we need to make in our lives, as St. Paul reminded us "Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice!

Amen