

Fr. Romeo Homily
December 16, 2018
Third Sunday of Advent

Pope Benedict XIV was pope from 1740 to 1758. But before being a pope, he was a lawyer. And a predecessor of his, Pope Clement XI, appointed him in charge of canonizations for some 20 years. In that capacity, he wrote an important book outlining the canonization process, a book which is still used today for canonizations. That book is in two volumes. The first part of the first volume explains what the first quality to look for in a candidate for canonization. And that is the candidate's sense of joy. If such joy is missing, then there is no need to continue the process; the person is simply not a canonizable saint. In other words, joy is the trademark of holiness. That is so true that saints like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis de Sales and St. John Bosco like to quote this old saying, "A sad saint is a bad saint".

This third Sunday in Advent has traditionally been called for centuries, during the time when people understood Latin, the Gaudete Sunday because the first word of the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass was Gaudete, the Latin word for "Rejoice". And, as we can see at a glance, the entire Mass is centered on the theme of joy, so much that today the priest may wear rose vestment at the Mass. For their parts, the Opening Prayer asks to "experience the joy of salvation", and the alternative prayer asks God to "remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which Christ's presence will bestow". Finally, the first and second readings, as well as the Responsorial Psalm, are pressing exhortations to rejoice. And not only to rejoice, but in the words of the apostle Paul, to rejoice "always".

How is it not a bit strange that we have to be commanded to rejoice? Doesn't everybody spontaneously want to be cheerful, to enjoy life, to be happy? Well, the strange thing is that, even though we all want to rejoice, the bare fact is that we rarely do, and that's a pity indeed! Maybe on this third Sunday of advent, all centered on joy, it would be a good thing to reflect on what, "hinders us from feeling.....joy and hope".

If we ask the specialist of the human heart, many of them will tell us that the enemies of joy are fear, worry, and anxiety. I think these are part of the top lists of people's problem every day. Now what does worry do? Here, author Charles Swindoll in his book "Laugh Again" has an interesting comment. "Of all the joy stealers that can torture our lives", he writes, "none is more nagging, more agitating, or more prevalent than worry. Worry makes a lot of people unhappy. Worry cuts off our motivation and lifeline of joy". Do you know what group of people are easy to please?

What then is the best remedy to worry, fear and anxiety? The answer to that question is suggested in today's second reading. The answer is to turn to God. We worry because we live as if God were not there. We see ourselves surrounded by problems, but we don't see we are also surrounded by God. Trusting and turning to God will kick all the worries that we have in life. Then we can Rejoice always in the Lord.