

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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Third Week of Advent 2020

Rejoice!

Today, the Scripture readings call us to joy. The Third Sunday of Advent known as “Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday” is that break in our Advent preparation where we move into a brighter day, a day of “Welcoming the Light.” The readings for Gaudete Sunday deal with rejoicing in our God as well as the mission of John the Baptist and his connection with Advent. Rejoice and witness. These are the two messages we have today. My main focus in this reflection is on joy.

St. Paul calls us in the second reading to “Rejoice always, pray constantly and for all things give thanks.” For Paul, as for the prophet Isaiah in the first reading, the thought of the “end times” of Christ’s coming, should be met with euphoria, “I exult for joy in Yahweh, my soul rejoices in my God!” The prophet announces that the coming of God’s messenger will mean healing and liberation for all who are poor, brokenhearted, imprisoned and captive. This “year of favor from Yahweh” applies to us all. The spirit of God continues to bring healing and freedom and works from within us.

What is this joy and rejoicing then? Henri Nouwen described the difference between joy and happiness. While happiness is dependent on external conditions, joy is “the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war or even death – can take that love away.” Thus, joy can be present even amidst sadness, pain, global pandemic, social unrest.....

We cannot wait for circumstances to bring us joy; we must make our own joy and let it act upon circumstances. A happy heart draws to itself all that it needs for happiness. People, things, and situations are wonderful when all is well but since they may change, we must depend on the Source which cannot change and from which all good flows. We can keep our hearts happy by drawing on the wellspring of joy that is deep within us.

Mary Oliver in her short prose poem “Don’t Hesitate” speaks of Joy: **“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don’t hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes, something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that’s often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don’t be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.”**

“Give in to Joy!” - Is that not a radical thought in these dark, uncertain, and challenging times, something to take to heart? It is true that joy is often sudden and unexpected, fleeting even. We too often let it slip by or hesitate to accept its sweetness. Let us take Mary Oliver’s simple advice to heart: “Don’t hesitate. Give in to joy.” Let us give in to it every chance we get!



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