

At the start of Advent, the parish offered you this book, *Living Joy*. It's spot on with the theme of today's Mass. It grabbed my attention by page 2, where the author writes: "Joy isn't what happens when life goes perfectly. It's what happens when you know you're loved perfectly, even when life's a mess."

That's the kind of joy today's readings are getting at: to remind us we're perfectly loved by God no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, that He is always with us in our tragedies, and, "we look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

Now we're human and can forget this. I throw a great self-pity party for myself occasionally, and maybe you do. Each of us has regrets, stresses, and failures we live with. Today's readings say: don't get stuck there, snap out of it, have joy – because God loves His faithful ones, like good parents love their children.

That was Zephaniah's message in our First Reading: that each one of us believers is loved. He says God rejoices in us, delights in us, even sings songs about us when we repent of our sins. So when people or events bring us down, remember: God is our mighty Savior, who forgives us and renews his love with us, and will raise us up to eternal life with Him. Trust Him!

In the Gospel, John the Baptist's audience is already joyful, because they're expecting the *Messiah*, their Savior. John isn't giving them a tongue-lashing; he's counseling them on how to prepare for Him, by sharing with those less fortunate, and treating people fairly. He's preaching good news to the people. It's only those who don't care about the *Messiah*, who don't prepare for his arrival, who are "the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

St. Paul was in prison, awaiting execution, when he wrote today's Second Reading. Even in those circumstances, he tells us "Rejoice in the Lord always." He knew that even faithful Christians need reminders that they are loved by God, and have a future with Him; that joy kept Paul going, and can keep us going, too.

So Christian joy isn't a mood; it's not the same thing as happiness, which comes and goes: it's deeper, it endures. It's clinging to the Good News of Christmas, that God became one of us, and saved us for eternal life. That's the gift Jesus brings us at the first Christmas, and at the second Christmas, when He comes again in glory at the end of time, when we will fully enjoy His gift.

Advent calls us out of our sadness, our losses, our sense of inadequacy. We celebrate Emmanuel, God-with-us. That's who gives us joy. We are never alone. We have a Savior, who forgives us and loves us. We prepare for the first and second Christmas, because Jesus became one of us, suffered like us, reconciled us to God, and promised us we will rise from the dead to eternal life with God, like He did.

I saw a t-shirt in Pueblo Mall that had a picture of Bigfoot on it, and it said: He doesn't believe in you, either. Well, God believes in each one of us. He believes we can change, repent, and live the life we were made for. We can be intentional disciples, doing God's will in our lives, by imitating Jesus.

Being grateful, thankful, leads us to joy. Every day, let's count our blessings, not dwell on our misfortunes; then we can train our minds to focus on the good things, not the bad. Put a note on the wall or in your smart phone, to remind you, when you're down in the dumps, that all things are passing; I am always loved; I am destined for eternal life with God. That will renew the power of joy in our lives, and nothing can crush us.

Fr. John Ozella, Saturday, December 11, 2021
Third Sunday of Advent, 4pm Mass at Christ the King