

Isaiah ended our First Reading with a prophecy about what it will be like when the *Messiah* comes. He said people will be crowned with everlasting joy, there won't be any more sorrow or mourning.

In the Gospel, Jesus refers to this joy when John the Baptist's disciples are sent to ask him if he's the *Messiah*, because they were expecting a warrior kind, and Jesus wasn't acting that way.

Jesus answers them with Isaiah's words earlier in our First Reading. Isaiah prophesied the blind will see, the lame will dance, lepers will be cured, the deaf will hear again, the dead will be raised to life. That's what Jesus is doing; those are the fruits of his ministry. Jesus is the *Messiah* who gives his people joy.

But what about now, huh? Well Christ has given us Christian joy, which can appear as cheerfulness or happiness. But it's more an internal attitude we can maintain when we're suffering.

Bishop Robert Barron has spoken about this, using the example of Christ on the cross. He says when we look at Jesus on the cross, we see he's in agony; but inside, he knows he's saving the whole human race so we can enjoy eternal life, and that is his joy.

The foundation for Christian joy is that God the Father loved us so much that He sent his son Jesus to earth, to put on skin, so that he could sacrifice his perfect human life for our sins, so that we can be reconciled with God and have eternal life. We thank God for this at every Mass.

We rejoice because Jesus came to open a path from earth to heaven for us, guaranteed by God. It's this Christian joy that helps us get through the tragedies that strike our lives: death of a loved one, divorce, getting laid off from work, bankruptcy, an accident or debilitating disease that limits our abilities – any tragedy or disappointment that's life-changing.

Christian joy affirms for us that whatever we go through in this life, it's not forever; it's only temporary. We don't have to get stuck there. ... We rejoice that whatever is happening in our lives, we can look forward to Christ returning in glory at the end of history; that we faithful disciples will have eternal life; we will see God face-to-face and enjoy being with him and our loved ones for forever. Then our joy will be unending.

For now, we do what we can with the time we have, to build up the Kingdom of God by living our faith: sharing, forgiving, loving, following Christ's teachings, until Christ returns in all his glory.

Reach out to unbelievers or lapsed Christians who don't have this Christian joy. They can get stuck in their problems. We may be their only hope. Pray for them. Bring them the true meaning of Christmas with a simple act of kindness, an invitation to join you at Mass, a word of encouragement. And remember conversion is gradual. That's how God works.

Stay conscious of your internal joy while suffering; trust in God's great power, that he will save each one of us. As we celebrate Christ's first coming on Christmas, remember he's coming again!

The promise of Advent is that God will finish his work in history, and in our souls, too. In our Second Reading St. James says he will do it according to his own schedule. Or like the theologian Teilhard de Chardin wrote: Above all, trust in the slow work of God. Until then, we live with patience and perseverance.

One way we can sustain our joy is to thank God each night before we go to bed for at least one thing that day. Not just "Thanks for Starbucks" (although I do that); but thank him for at least one way that he acted in our lives through an event or through another person that day. Thanking him each day, from our hearts, will help us sustain our joy, which gets us through those times when we have to walk where we do not wish to go.

Fr. John Ozella – Third Sunday of Advent – December 11, 2022