

DECEMBER – JOY

Joy is an attribute of God's divine love. To reflect God in our family life, we are called to be joyful by developing our relationship with Christ.

Breaking Open the Theme

It is often remarked that faith is caught more than taught in the family. One of the best ways faith is caught is through joy. Joy is not an emotion that can be faked or forced. There is something authentic about it that points to a deeper reality.

Joy should be part of the regular fabric of Christian life. The Lord promises his disciples that “no one will take your joy from you” (Jn 16:22), and we are instructed by St. Paul to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4).

But how is it possible to be joyful when there is sorrow in our lives? The answer is that joy in its deepest sense is not dependent on positive circumstances or upbeat feelings. Joy means having an encounter (*encuentro*) with God's infinite love for us, which is always present in our lives.³⁷ It “adapts and changes, but always endures,”³⁸ even amid great sorrow. It takes the form of a quiet assurance, a reminder that we are God's beloved sons and daughters. At other times, joy means that one “rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6), praising aloud the Lord and thanking him for his gifts. But above all, joy comes from “an expansion of the heart”³⁹ through prayer and gestures of love toward others, creating a bright, warm and cheerful atmosphere.

Meditation

From Pope Francis' Amoris Laetitia

The expression “*chaírei epi te adikía*” [“rejoice over wrongdoing”] (1 Cor 13:6). has to do with a negativity lurking deep within a person's heart. It is the toxic attitude of those who rejoice at seeing an injustice done to others. The following phrase expresses its opposite: *sygchaírei te aletheía*: “it rejoices in the right”. In other words, we rejoice at the good of others when we see their dignity and value their abilities and good works. This is impossible for those who must always be comparing and competing, even with their spouse, so that they secretly rejoice in their failures.

When a loving person can do good for others, or sees that others are happy, they themselves live happily and in this way give glory to God, for “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). Our Lord especially appreciates those who find joy in the happiness of others. If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others and focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence,

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for, as Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The family must always be a place where, when something good happens to one of its members, they know that others will be there to celebrate it with them.⁴⁰

1. What are some joys we have experienced in our family? Are there ways to build upon these joys to create a more joyful home?
2. In what ways could we add more joy to our family? Could we be more cheerful in giving and complain less? Could we focus less on our own needs and more on the happiness of a family member? Could we rejoice in our family’s love by affirming each other more with compliments? Could we smile more at our family members?
3. Do we base our lives on the joyful awareness that we are beloved sons and daughters of God, or do we let something rob us of the joy of the Gospel? What is it that robs us? Is it anxiety, fear or impatience? How might prayer help with these things?

Scripture Reading — Psalm 33:1-7, 20-22

A prayer of praise and rejoicing before the Lord

Rejoice, you righteous, in the LORD;
praise from the upright is fitting.
Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
on the ten-stringed lyre offer praise.
Sing to him a new song;
skillfully play with joyful chant.
For the LORD’s word is upright;
all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right.
The earth is full of the mercy of the LORD.
By the LORD’s word the heavens were made;
by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathered the waters of the sea as a mound;
he sets the deep into storage vaults.
Our soul waits for the LORD,
he is our help and shield.

For in him our hearts rejoice;
in his holy name we trust.
May your mercy, LORD, be upon us;
as we put our hope in you.

Family Project

Put joy into practice by singing together Advent and Christmas hymns, hosting an Advent or Christmas party with special treats, and reading a Christmas story out loud. The story could be Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* or a book more suitable for young children, like *The Legend of the Poinsettia* by Tomie dePaola.

Also consider creating a family book of favorite religious hymns and carols. Have each family member choose a song that they enjoy and make copies to share. Then sing together Advent and Christmas songs at times that are convenient. For instance, a family could sing before its family prayer, before bed, before lighting the Advent wreath, before opening presents at Christmas, or at another time. If you have young children, sing a few simple songs to them so they can begin to learn the lyrics.