

Throughout her ministry in Jesus' name, Mother Teresa brought untold blessings and joy to the poor who lay unattended and forgotten on the streets of Calcutta.

When asked the source of her joy, Mother Teresa replied: "Joy is prayer – Joy is strength – Joy is love – Joy is a net of love – A Joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love....loving as He loves, helping as He helps, giving as He gives, serving as He serves, rescuing as He rescues, being with Him twenty-four hours, touching Him in His distressing disguise.

She was once asked if she ever got discouraged. She answered that she is always happy. "Discouragement comes from pride," she always said. "We must be people of hope. It's not success that matters to God but faithfulness. Never stop trying."

You can imagine she had a lot of problems and cares in her ministry, yet she did not worry about yesterday or tomorrow. She often said, "Do what you can, do it now and do it well." People of all walks of life, of every social standing and position went to her. She always gave them what she referred to as her business card. It was one of the most profound, yet simple, statements

of what spiritual life is all about. It said: “The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. And the fruit of service is grace.”

When Advent arrived every year, Mother Teresa’s life, continued to witness the joy which is the true hallmark of every Christian and the rightful inheritance of all the poor.

The Third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete Sunday” because the Mass for today, in its original Latin text, begins with the opening antiphon: “Gaudete in Domino semper” – “Rejoice in the Lord always.” To remind ourselves that we are preparing for the joyful occasion of the birth of Jesus on Christmas day, we light the rose or pink candle in the Advent wreath, and the priest may wear rose or pink vestments. The common theme of today’s Scripture readings is one of joy and encouragement. The readings urge us to make the preparations required of us as we await the rebirth of Jesus in our hearts and lives. Holy Scripture reminds us that the coming of Jesus, past, present, and future, is the reason for our rejoicing.

The prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, encourages the Jewish exiles returning from Babylon to rejoice because their God, Yahweh, is their strong Guide, Provider and Protector.

In today's Responsorial Psalm, Mary rejoices in the great blessing given to her, exclaiming: "My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit finds joy in God my Savior."

St. Paul, in the second reading, advises the Thessalonian Christians to "rejoice always" by leading blameless, holy and thankful lives guided by the Holy Spirit, because Christ's second coming is near, and He is faithful in His promise to reward them.

Today's Gospel reading tells us that John the Baptist came to bear witness to Jesus as the Light of the world. John wants all the Jews to rejoice because the long-expected Messiah, as the light of the world, will remove the darkness of sin from the world. We then have a reason to rejoice, because, like John the Baptist, we, too, are chosen to bear witness to Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

We hear “rejoice” in Church, but when we walk in the mall, we see few smiling faces. Shoppers seem to be intent and tense. Perhaps they and we are experiencing increased stress, painful family memories, broken relationships, shattered dreams, unrealistic expectations – to name a few experiences that impact us in what should be a season of joyful expectation.

Does it not seem inappropriate, incongruous to hear about rejoicing? Not at all! The reason for rejoicing is not finding the perfect gift for someone you really love or finding the adequate gift for someone you really don't love. The reason for rejoicing is not a shallow, temporary change from emotional “business as usual.”

Where is joy to be found? Today's Scripture readings teach us our source of rejoicing. Isaiah, in the first reading, speaks to the children of Israel who suffered so much for so long: “Rejoice in the Lord.” In the responsorial Psalm, we answered: “ My soul rejoices in my God.” Paul was shipwrecked, flogged an inch of his life several times, publicly mocked, run out of town. He said to those who were waiting for the second coming of Christ: “Rejoice always, render constant thanks.”

This was surely more than urging a positive attitude toward life, more than a pop psychology of positive thinking.

Paul also says, “render constant thanks” for the forgiveness Jesus brought.” He deeply believes that real joy abides in the soul of the one who has absorbed this and has entrusted himself or herself totally to the hands of God. It is anchored in something more stable than the shifting sands of life’s fortunes. It is rooted in God Himself.

Joy is a resilient choice no matter what happens to us. Joy arises out of a contented heart where the contentment is based on the lasting presence of God.

Joy is the fundamental stance of the heart: a conviction, a gift of God. It is rooted in our unending relationship with God, remembered during Advent as we recall the coming of Jesus who made our relationship a reality.

Joy is a constant glimpse of eternity. It is a whisper in the night of difficulties that will become a resounding chorus of the full presence of God.

Joy is constantly picturing our Lord before us. We look at the expression in His eyes. We “waste” time with Him – first in total silence – just looking at Him with His loving eyes that encompasses forgiveness, acceptance and value. Then we acknowledge our total reliance on Him. The experience that follows is joy.

There is an old story of a father who, on a dark, stormy night in the midst of the thunder’s crash and the lightning’s flash, awakened and thought of his small son alone in the bedroom upstairs who might be scared of it all. So he rushed upstairs with his flashlight to check on the boy to see if he was all right. He was flashing the light around the room when the boy awakened, and said, with a startled cry, “Who is there? Who’s in my room?” The father’

s first thought was to flash his light in the face of the boy, but then he thought, “No. If I do that, I will frighten him all the more.” So he turned the light on his own face. And the little boy said, “Oh, it’s you, Dad?” The father said, “Yes, it’s Dad. I’m just up here checking on things. Everything’s OK, so go on back to sleep.” And the little boy did that.

That is what the Incarnation is all about: God's shining the light in His own face so that you and I might know that everything is really OK.