

**December 13, 2020 Joy Homily:** Most of us are familiar with the villains appearing in traditional Christmas motion pictures. They are not easily forgotten. Consider, the character of Scrooge a miserly old curmudgeon, from Charles Dicken's *"A Christmas Carol"*; or Thomas Mara, the prosecuting attorney from the film, *"Miracle on Thirty-fourth Street"*, who put Kris Kringle (Santa Claus) on trial; or Mister Potter of *"It's a Wonderful Life"*, the rich, old miser of Bedford Falls who is determined to make George Bailey's Christmas, and everybody else's, miserable; or the Grinch who stole Christmas and the Burgermeister in *"Santa Claus is Coming to Town"*. True, all the above characters behaved badly, but they also have something else in common: the absence of joy. They are never found laughing, smiling, singing or dancing. Their vision of life is clouded by rage, sadness and despair.

Today is Gaudete Sunday, a day for rejoicing. The Third Sunday of Advent is represented by a rose colored candle, a hint of the joy to come. Christians live in joyful expectation of the coming of Christ. The notion of joy is fundamental to Christianity, which, by its very nature, claims to be "Good News". The joy of the Christian faith springs from the certainty that God is near, he is with me in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health. Joy even endures the most severe trials life can offer us.

To rejoice is to have a joy that the world cannot take away. There is one joy that never fades with time... the joy of Christian hope! It is a gift of the Holy Spirit and so, is from above. Because we belong to Christ, joy should outweigh everything in us.

In today's epistle, Saint Paul delineates the three marks of the Christian: Joy, gratitude and prayer. His exhortation is worth noting: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus". (I Thess. 5:16-18) The apostle believes that all true joy is joy in the Lord and that there can be no true joy without the Lord. Joy must never be confused with pleasure which is ephemeral. True joy is linked to our relationship with God. Those who have encountered Christ in their own lives feel a security and joy in their hearts that no one and no situation can take away.

A true story: At noon on November 13, 2010, unsuspecting shoppers got a surprise while dining at a Christmas food court in a shopping mall. They encountered a "flash mob", a group of like-minded people who assemble in a public place and, with no advance notice, perform for a brief time and then quickly disperse. In this shopping mall, where religious symbols of Christ's birth were noticeably absent, the diners heard the *"Hallelujah Chorus"* from *"Handel's Messiah"*. First, a young woman stood up and launched into the singing of the uplifting chorus. She was followed a young man and then others who joined her in the singing. It was truly infectious and deeply moved the listeners. Many stood up and cheered.

There is a lesson to be learned here. The joy of Christmas is irrepressible; it cannot be stifled. All attempts to marginalize Christians on the feast of Christ's birth are bound to fail. The merchants may distort the meaning of Christmas, but at the end of the day, Christians can repeat the words of the traditional hymn, "Joy to the World, the Lord has come".

As Christmas day draws near, we can repeat with conviction the words of the prophet Isaiah from today's first reading: "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul".  
(Is.61:10)

Amen!