

Advent Week Three
JOY: The Weary World Rejoices as Liberation Comes
December 15-21, 2019

Advent is a time to examine our faith and then put feet to it.

Mark Twain said: "Comparison is the death of joy." Our participation in the world of social media gives us an open invitation into comparison. It allows us to compare our lives/jobs/spouses/kids/finances/etc. to others. We can see how many vacations our friends are going on or perhaps the latest gadget someone we know has bought. We see someone we know seemingly rock at parenting and it feels like we can't get our stuff together. It's easy to see what folks post (and folks rarely post the hard things) and compare our lives. The danger here is that more often than not, our conclusion is that we are not enough... we must be doing something wrong. Not working hard enough, not worthy of love, not intelligent enough in business decisions, not beautiful enough, not far enough along in life.... and the list goes on. Maybe you could fill in the blank here. "If only I..." Pretty soon, we get comparison fatigue, and we aren't able to see the goodness and beauty of the lives we have in front of us because we are stuck in a rut of comparing ourselves to others. Our joy is robbed from us.

Joy is a precious gift and is something we must protect. One of the best ways to protect joy is to practice gratitude. What or who are you deeply grateful for? What would your life look like without this person/ thing? What are you grateful for about your spiritual journey? Consider these things and by doing so, you may nurture joy.

Another way to nurture joy is to serve others. Serving others takes you out of your world and into the needs of someone else's. When you care about if someone has had enough water or if the water they have had is lead-free, then you cannot at the same time, hate that person. If you care about someone having enough clothing to keep warm, then you find that you care less about needing more clothing yourself. When we live as if our well-being is tied to our neighbor's well-being, it is a spirit changer.

Scripture:

Luke 2:10: "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people..."

Matthew 11:2-6: 2 Now when John heard in prison about the things the Christ was doing, he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking, 3 "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" 4 Jesus responded, "Go, report to John what you hear and see. 5 Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news proclaimed to them. 6 Happy are those who don't stumble and fall because of me."

Matthew 25:34-39: 34 "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. 35 I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed

me. 36 I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'37 "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

Readings:

"Be joyful as though you have considered all the facts."
-Wendall Berry from "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front"

"Joy is always a surprise and often a decision. Joy is portable. Joy is a habit, and these days it can be a radical act. Buffy Sainte-Marie said, "keep your nose to the joy trail.""

-Anne Lamott in *Almost Everything: Notes on Hope*

"Being generous of spirit is a wonderful way to live."

-Pete Seeger

"Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love [people]...I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least..."

"We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know [God] in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore." -Selected quotes from Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist*

Prayer: Center this thought in prayer this week,
*O God the Light of the World,
prepare our hearts, for Emmanuel is coming.
Teach us joy in our waiting. Amen.*

Questions to consider: How is joy distinct from happiness? What does deep joy feel like in your body; what does deep joy feel like in your spirit; what does deep joy feel like in your mind/emotions? Do you have harsh expectations of yourself that preclude you from joy?

Spiritual Practices: This week, try keeping a gratitude journal/list. It can be written in your journal, as an email draft, or even on the back of a grocery receipt. Begin with considering the most obvious things or people that you are grateful for. And then keep going, what are the smaller things that you are grateful for? These are easier to take for granted. What would your life look like without these things or these people? What would your life look like without being in a personal relationship with your Creator? Cultivate gratitude and you will uncover deep joy.

Catch the Sunday Advent sermon for December 15th (posted on Monday) [here](#).