

HOMILY ~ THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 16/17, 2023

Back many years when I was in Seminary, we were on retreat at Columbar; and we were celebrating Mass in the Chapel. It was just a group of Seminarians. I had to use the restroom so I went out; and in the back of the Chapel, there were a bunch of doors that were all glass. I noticed that there was a man standing there looking in. After I did my thing and when I was going back into the Chapel, I noticed that that man was still standing there looking in. I said, *“Please join us. You are welcome to come in.”* He said, *“No thanks. They don’t look like they are having any fun in there.”* We had every reason to be joyful. We were encountering Jesus in the Word of God, in the congregation and in the Eucharist; but I guess you cannot always see joy.

In the Second Reading, we hear, *“Rejoice always.”* How can we do that? Well, I think we can always find joy. Joy is different from happiness, which goes up and down depending upon what is going on in your environment. Joy is a choice. St. Paul gives us some suggestions of how we can rejoice always. He tells us, *“Pray without ceasing.”* He does not mean walking around all day reciting prayers. I think he means finding God in the present in what is going on in our lives. To do this, we need to stay in the present moment. We sometimes spend all of our time either ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. In the meantime, we are missing our lives. We need to live in the present. We need to look at the world around us with a sense of curiosity and wonder, and look for God. I like to start my day listing all of the things I have to be thankful for in the present moment. Even if I am going through a difficult stressful time, I can always find a list of things to be grateful for. That brings me joy. I get up every morning at 6:00 am while it is still dark and pray in my sunroom. When I look out the window, I see my front yard and the soccer field across the street at Madonna; it is all open. I see the most beautiful sunrises almost every morning. We know that the sun rises every morning and sets every evening; and sometimes we think we know all about the science that is involved, but we forget about the mystery. The same God that gave me life and lives in me is that God that created the

whole universe and keeps it in motion. God created order out of chaos and sustains it. I am not observing nature, I am part of it. I have a sense of awe and wonder with every sunrise. That brings me joy. Many days I take a wonder walk around the neighborhood. I leave my phone and my ear buds at home, and I just observe the environment with a sense of curiosity and wonder. This is a different type of prayer. At this time of the year, I look at all of the decorations that everyone has on their homes. You have to walk the neighborhood to really see it. You miss it if you just drive by. So many people spend a lot of time and effort decorating. I wonder if we take the opportunity to enjoy it. That brings me joy.

St. Paul also tells us, *"In all circumstances, give thanks."* When things happen that I did not plan, did not expect or did not want, I try to say, *"I guess this is what was supposed to happen"* and approach it with wonder and curiosity. We tend to think that there is one right answer for everything. That is just not true. We need to become more comfortable with all of the shades of gray and all of the different points of view. I know that everything that has given my life meaning and purpose and fulfillment involved some struggle and some work. When things are going well as planned that can be pleasant, and it can make me happy; but when I overcome adversity or work hard to achieve a goal, or make something positive out of a difficult situation, that brings me joy.

St. Paul also tells us, *"Do not quench the Spirit."* If we are going through life not paying much attention to what is going on around us, we miss the creative actions of the Holy Spirit all around us. We need to live our lives in the present with a sense of curiosity and wonder. Sometimes the Holy Spirit provides me with an answer to my question or the solution to my problem, and it is right there in front of me. Sometimes it has been there for a while, and I just did not see it. That brings me joy. So, *"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks ... Do not quench the Spirit."* Live your life in the present with a sense of wonder and curiosity. That will bring you joy.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim