

+ J. M. J.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us liturgy is an action of Christ which includes of course Jesus as its head and each member of the body of Christ. There are those in heaven celebrating the feast in perfect communion and there are we here celebrating with signs. We then join Christ the head in this action, his prayer. Today it is clear that Jesus' prayer is "Rejoice." "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! The Lord is near" (Phil. 4:4-5).

As we come to Mass today we bring with it our many problems, our struggles, our sins, our anxieties. We may not particularly feel like rejoicing this Sunday. We may not think we are able to rejoice this Sunday. If we are going to talk about rejoicing it is a good thing to ask what is joy anyways. Ask yourself when was the last time you experienced joy.

St. Thomas Aquinas gives the best definition of joy that I have read. Joy like love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy is what we experience when we are with the one we love. If we recall those times of joy in our lives it's certain that they revolved around being with someone that we loved deeply. It is being with our parents, our spouse, our children, family, and friends that brings joy. We may remember different celebrations, vacations, etc.; there was joy because of those whom we spent those times with. Joy is being with the one we love.

Here's the amazing thing. These fruits of love and joy run so deep that they can even be and often are present in situations that are painful. We think back to those memories with our loved ones and we remember some of them were difficult at the time. Now, though, we can look fondly on those same times. They bring us laughter and levity, and we recall them whenever we are with those special people. They bring tears of joy to our eyes. Consider the story of the apostles. They were arrested and flogged and they rejoiced. They rejoiced because at that moment they were closely united to Jesus who was also scourged. They were suffering for his name and they rejoiced.

When we meditate about our relationships we ultimately come to realize it is Jesus who brings us true joy. We experience joy in this world because we see his goodness and his love in those that are most

special to us. The reason for our joy today is we are readying our hearts for his coming at Christmas which is only a few days away.

Especially in a week when we remembered the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe we look to the Blessed Virgin Mary. When the angel Gabriel said Hail Mary that is another way of saying Rejoice, Mary, and it is fitting that Mary would rejoice because she was so closely united with our Savior. She is full of joy because she is full of grace. We give Mary the title cause of our joy and we have seven stained glass windows depicting the seven joys of Mary from the Franciscan tradition. The exhortation from Zephaniah **“Rejoice... O Daughter of Jerusalem... the Lord your God is in your midst”** (Zeph. 3:14) especially applies to Mary. She rejoiced because she bore the Savior and remained close to him for her entire life.

Well, we can hardly speak about joy without speaking about another fruit, the fruit of peace. When we are with the one we love and are therefore filled with joy there are two consequences. The first is that our joy cannot be disturbed by anxieties and outside pressures. No matter what external factors come about we have our love which is of more importance than anything else in the world. Many experienced this, this year. With economic tightening we were forced to return to the things that matter most. We began to focus on more on relationships and less on things. This leads to the second consequence; the peace from love and joy is such that we desire nothing more than those whom we love and their love in return. It is from being united to Christ that Mary can rejoice even when she is our lady of sorrows. It is from their love of Christ that the apostles can rejoice even as they suffered. When we have that joy that comes from our loving relationship with Jesus Christ we have a peace that puts all our anxieties into perspective. That we can have peace amongst all our struggles is mindboggling, which is why St. Paul tells us to ask for **“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.”**

With Christmas twelve days away we are much like that crowd questioning John the Baptist when he preached repentance. We await our Savior, who brings us love, joy, and peace, and so we ask what should

we do in preparation. This morning then let's ask our Lord what we must do to prepare our lives to receive an abundance of his love at Christmas and thereby enjoy the joy and peace that is a foreshadowing of the joy and peace we shall enjoy with the saints for all eternity.

Peace be with you.