

# Sunday, December 16, 2018

## Third Sunday of Advent

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading     Zephaniah 3:14-18

2nd Reading:    Philippians 4:4-7

Responsorial:    (Psalm) Isaiah 12:2-6

Gospel:            Luke 3: 10-18

### *Advent, A Time to Rejoice in the Lord's Great Love for Us*

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)*

St. Paul believed that rejoicing was a basic disposition that we all should try to maintain, even when things don't go our way. In his short Letter to the Philippians, in fact, he spoke about rejoicing fifteen times. And let's not forget that Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter! He was not going to let his circumstances rob him of his joy.

So how did Paul maintain a joyful disposition? First, he rejoiced because he knew Jesus' love. If you back up just two chapters in this letter, you'll see him singing a hymn that extols Jesus' willingness to empty himself, become a man, and die on the cross (Philippians 2:7-8). And then in the next chapter, he writes, "I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8). The thought of Jesus' love—a love that gives of itself freely—continually filled Paul with joy.

Second, Paul rejoiced in the Philippians themselves. They were his joy and his crown (Philippians 4:1). They were his dear friends who had joined him in a "partnership for the gospel" (1:5). He rejoiced because he knew he had brothers and sisters who loved him and supported him in his faith.

We will all encounter times of trial and suffering, but Jesus asks us to rejoice whether or not the sun is shining on us. He especially wants us to rejoice as we prepare for Christmas. If Paul were here, he would urge us to keep things in perspective—to look at our lives through the lens of God's love. He would urge us never to let anxiousness rule our lives, but to strive to keep our sense of peace at all times. He would urge us to pray through the tough times and to find reasons to rejoice.

Jesus has done so much for us. Let's repay him by rejoicing in his love—and sharing that joy with the people around us.

*"Lord, help me hold onto my joy, especially when I face the difficult challenges of life."*

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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### Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The 1st Reading from Zephaniah begins with these words: *Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has removed the judgment against you he has turned away your enemies; the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear.*
  - Zephaniah tells us to “shout for joy”! What are some of the reasons he describes for doing this?
  - Are there areas in your life that make you want to “shout for joy”? What are they?
2. The Responsorial Psalm from the Book of Isaiah opens with these uplifting words: *God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior. With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation.* It ends with these words: *Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement; let this be known throughout all the earth. Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!*
  - The Responsorial Psalm, in addition to speaking of joy in the Lord, also speaks of the confidence, strength, and courage that comes from the Lord? In what specific ways is this true in your life?
  - How do you allow the confidence, strength, and courage you find in Christ to be an example to others? What are some specific steps you can take during the Advent and Christmas season to do even better?
3. St. Paul, in the 2nd Reading, continues the theme of joy in the Lord: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all.* He goes on to describe a source of this joy: *The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
  - During Advent, why should we *Rejoice in the Lord*, not only in the coming of our Lord as a baby at Bethlehem, but also his coming into our hearts as well?
  - Why do you think St. Paul stresses the importance of “prayer and petition” as the key to having “no anxiety” and the source of the “peace of God”?
  - Why do you think St. Paul stresses the importance of “prayer and petition” as the key to having “no anxiety” and the source of the “peace of God”? How important to you is a daily time of “prayer and petition”? Why?
4. In the Gospel, John the Baptist reminds us of our responsibility to share with others in need with these words: *Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.* He also “preached good news to the people” with these words: *I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.*
  - What do the words of John the Baptist mean to you?
  - What are some ways you can share your time, talent, and treasure with those who are needy? Who are those that you know that need to also hear the “good news” of Christmas? Are you willing to be the one to do it?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice* (Philippians 4:4). It ends with these words: “We will all encounter times of trial and suffering, but Jesus asks us to rejoice whether or not the sun is shining on us. He especially wants us to rejoice as we prepare for Christmas. If Paul were here, he would urge us to keep things in perspective—to look at our lives through the lens of God’s love. He would urge us never to let anxiousness rule our lives, but to strive to keep our sense of peace at all times. He would urge us to pray through the tough times and to find reasons to rejoice. Jesus has done so much for us. Let’s repay him by rejoicing in his love—and sharing that joy with the people around us.”
  - What do you think it means to “look at our lives through the lens of God’s love”? How well are you at bringing your struggles, both big and small, to the Lord in prayer? What happens when you do?
  - What are some ways you can implement these last words of the meditation: “Jesus has done so much for us. Let’s repay him by rejoicing in his love—and sharing that joy with the people around us”?

**Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for all the reasons to rejoice during this grace-filled Advent and Christmas Season, even if you have or will be encountering “times of trial and suffering.” Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.**

***“Lord, help me hold onto my joy, especially when I face the difficult challenges of life.”***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization ([www.christlife.org](http://www.christlife.org)), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal ([www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at [mblumberg@wau.org](mailto:mblumberg@wau.org) or [mblumberg@aol.com](mailto:mblumberg@aol.com).]