

- “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.”
- Today my friends we are called to rejoice! It is the third Sunday of Advent, popularly known as *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* is a Latin word that means *rejoice!* And we are called to rejoice, to be overcome with joy, because our Lord is near.
- In just a little more than a week, we’ll be celebrating the birth of our Savior: the One whose coming was foretold by prophets and heralded by angels, the One whom only a sinless virgin was worthy to bear.
- Disguised as a tiny babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, our Lord will come with the mighty gift of salvation, with the power to save us from our sins, and to rescue us from eternal death.
- Can there be any better reason for us to rejoice? Truly, this is always one of my favorite Sundays of the year because of its joyful tone.
- Yet, understand that the call to rejoice that we hear in our readings and prayers of this Mass is not simply a good idea or a helpful suggestion. God wants us to rejoice, for rejoicing in Him and His gift of salvation is central to living out our Faith.
- The Catholic Faith is meant to be lived with joy, with gusto, with a *joie de vivre* as the French would say!
- St. Teresa of Ávila once said: “O Lord, save us from sour-faced saints.” Her point is that those who profess the Faith but fail to show joy in living it out end up undermining the Faith.
- Truly, if we really believe what we profess as Catholics, then why wouldn’t we be always joyful? And so, we each of us must be imbued with true Christian joy.
- You see, because we are made as eternal creatures, we all desire something that is eternal. And that’s what true Christian joy is – it is taking pleasure in the knowledge of eternal goods.
- Whereas human happiness is simply an emotion or feeling, and whereas the pleasures of this world are transitory and fleeting, true Christian joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and is a gift from God.
- True Christian joy is an abiding sense of peace that comes from having faith in God. It is an abiding certainty within our souls that no matter what is going on in our lives, God is near to us, and He’s in control.
- True Christian joy retains composure and a peaceful smile at all times, even in the midst of a crisis. It is strength to carry on when our human nature tells us to quit.
- Christian joy is able to look at this beautiful world of ours and see God’s finger prints everywhere. And while not oblivious to evil in the world, true Christian joy looks at our broken and fallen world and sees an immense amount of good.
- How do we find this joy? Only by following God’s will. As we all know, God has a very special and particular plan for each of us, and it is only by seeking out His will for our lives and doing our best to follow it that we will ever know true Christian joy.
- Of course, keep in mind that this does not mean that following God’s will is easy. In fact, following God’s will can often make us unhappy because God’s will necessarily entails carrying the cross.
- Although it seems strange, we can still be joyful deep in our hearts even when we are emotionally unhappy. But this requires that we be living lives of faith, hope, and charity.
- You see, when we have a strong faith in God, we can have joy even in the midst of suffering because faith reminds us that God is in control, and that He desires to save us.

- When we have hope, we are reminded that God and eternal life with Him are our highest good, and that if we are faithful to Him, we will return to Him when we die.
- And when we have charity, a true love for God, we are willing to suffer all that we must in order to please Him, because we know with St. Paul that love *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never fails.* (cf. 1 Cor 13).
- Thus, true Christian joy is undergirded by our faith, enlivened by our hope, and strengthened and directed by our charity. And thus, joy can be with us, even when we suffer.
- Joy in the midst of suffering: it seems almost contradictory, and of course to those who belong to this world, it is a contradiction.
- But for those of us who belong to the world to come, those of us who bear the name *Christian* on our souls, we know that joy and suffering are not mutually exclusive, but that they often exist together in one's soul.
- This is because it is through suffering that we become more like our Savior whose name we bear by the grace of the sacraments. Our suffering configures us to Him who suffered for us and because of us. And for a Christian, this is cause for great joy indeed.
- Even though we sometimes have to struggle and suffer in life, true Christian joy sustains us through those rough moments. Even more, true joy can help us gladly face of trials and persecution, as we see in the lives of so many wonderful saints.
- St. Lawrence, one of the early martyrs of the Church, was roasted to death on a huge grill. And yet because he never lost his sense of joy, he was able to tease his executioners by telling them, "You can turn me over now; I'm done on this side."
- In our own time, Mother Teresa exhibited joy like no one else in the world. And yet for 40 years of her life she felt absolutely no consolation in prayer. She was plagued by constant doubts and truly experienced what we call a "dark night of the soul."
- And yet no one knew her pain and suffering because of her joy.
- My friends, true Christian joy – our ability to rejoice at all times – is our testimony to who Christ is. It is a sign of God's almighty power at work in a dark world and of our trust in Him. It is a sign of our desire to conform our lives perfectly to His will.
- While we may have to suffer and struggle from time to time, if we have joy in our hearts, we shall surely overcome whatever it is that ails us.
- My friends, rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice! For the Lord is near indeed. With the joy that comes from this sure and certain knowledge, may we carry our crosses well.