

Third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of rejoicing.

In today's 2nd Reading, St Paul actually commands us "rejoice in the Lord **ALWAYS**."

- Then the very next sentence says, "I say it again, rejoice!"
- So what is Christian Joy?

Christian joy is different from worldly joy in three ways.

First, it doesn't wear out –

because Christian joy comes from something that is eternally alive – Jesus Christ.

This is why one of the symbols of Christmas is the evergreen tree.

Always green and fragrant - It symbolizes our hope amid winter's cold dark days.

Second, Christ's joy gets more and more intense as we advance in our journey of faith.

- The longer you live as a Christian, the more you experience the joy of Jesus
- Like color of the sky at sunrise, when the sun is just coming up.
- The horizon gets brighter and brighter as the sun rises.
- For faithful Christians, life is like on long sunrise getting brighter & brighter.

Third, the more we give this joy to others, the more we will have for ourselves.

- This is one reason why we have the tradition of exchanging gifts on Christmas.
- We've all experienced doing something for others brings fulfillment & joy.

Having a relationship with Jesus Christ is the source of the everlasting joy of Philippians.

The deeper this relationship is, the more we experience Christian joy.

It depends on (1) knowing Jesus, (2) loving Jesus, and (3) imitating Jesus.

- The fact that we are here today shows that all of us already know and love Jesus
 - But what about imitating him?
- Imagine someone following us around with a video camera for a week –
 - Would our lives reflect an effort to imitate our Christian faith?

In the Gospel the Crowd, the Tax Collectors, the Soldiers all ask "What should we do?"

What should WE do? IMITATE JESUS

Advent still has two weeks left -

Let's make it our goal to be better imitators of Jesus than we are today – How?

1. First, start each day in prayer, because without God's help it won't happen
2. Second, live the Golden Rule – with everyone

If we strive to know, love, and imitate Christ our lives can be fountains of Christian joy.

A Legend about Christmas Trees (especially for children)

The legend says that when Jesus was seven-years-old his mother Mary gave a birthday party for him and he received loads of presents. When Mary put Jesus to bed that night, he started to think of all the other poor children of Nazareth who had so few toys, and who never had birthday parties. So he called some of his angels to help him, and when everyone in Nazareth was asleep, he went from house to house leaving the presents he had received for the poor children. Then he told the angels to gather shoes and clothing for the children too. These he hung from an evergreen tree in front of one of the humble homes.

The angels helped hang the gifts even from the tops of the tree, and in doing so some of their golden hair caught on the needles of the branches. The strands of gold shined and glittered, giving the tree a beautiful appearance. Then Jesus went home and sent the angels back to heaven.

The next morning, the children woke up and were overjoyed to find presents for everyone. Since they didn't know who had given the gifts, they thanked God. Through the years, they kept on telling the story over and over again, so that after a while people started using evergreen trees to celebrate the birthday of Christ.

It's only a legend, of course, a nice story.