

Anyone listening to J. S. Bach's 'Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring' cannot help but be enraptured by the beauty of this music and its ability to lift the soul. The joy that Bach so exquisitely expresses in his music is a deeply religious sentiment. It is not a joy that can be manufactured, bought or procured. Rather, it is the joy that is experience through our encounter with the living God.

On this third Sunday of Advent the theme of joy threads its way through the liturgy. The entrance antiphon announces the theme: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." We light the rose candle, a symbol of joy.

In the first reading from the prophet Zephaniah we have an image of a God who dances with delight for his people. The people are exhorted to shout for joy and to rejoice, for their God is in their midst: "Rejoice, exult with all your heart". God's presence among them lifts them up out of their misery. The theme continues in the responsorial psalm "Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the holy one of Israel".

We are left no doubt that joy is meant to be a characteristic of the Christian life. Joy does not cancel out the sufferings that afflict our lives and our world. But the gift of grace that we experience as joy, lifts us up, and empowers us to be God's liberating presence in our world.

In his apostolic exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis concludes with a prayer to Mary part of which reads: "Filled with Christ's presence, you brought joy to John the Baptist, making him exult in the womb of his mother. Brimming over with joy, you sang of the great things done by God. Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith, you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection, and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit so that the evangelizing Church might be born."

**Peace and blessings,
Gerard**