

ADVENT SUNDAY III "C"
DECEMBER 15/16, 2018

The past two Advent weekends we have reflected on the Scriptures through the technological metaphors of "refresh" and "reboot." This weekend, the traditional "Gaudete" (Rejoicing) Sunday in Advent, we glimpse what a "refreshed" and/or "rebooted" Christian life looks like. It is a life of joy.

Christian joy is not "giddiness", "hilarity", or "stomach busting laughter". Rather, it is the fruit of a life rooted in the sure knowledge of the abiding presence of God, and specifically for the Christian, of Jesus in every circumstance, good and bad which radiates through all of my actions and contacts in life. St. Paul in today's second reading proclaims it as "that peace which surpasses all understanding".

Joy, the fruit of a "refreshed" and/or "rebooted" faith life, flows from repentance, a "rebooting" to use last Sunday's analogy, that redirects not only our understanding and relationship with God, but also with others. It is, in the words of the popular Catholic speaker and author Matthew Kelly, to discover (or re-discover) the best version of ourselves.

Christian joy has two components.

First of all, joy is knowing not only, or even primarily on a purely or solely intellectual level, but emanating from the deepest level of my life, my heart and soul, who God is for me, who I am for God, and where my ultimate destiny as a believer, a child of God through Jesus is directed. In the recent tributes paid to the late former president, George H.W. Bush I was reminded of this truth by James Baker the former president's Secretary of State. Recounting his visit with the former president as he lay dying, Mr. Baker said that the two of them talked, not about their political or personal accomplishments, but about the end of their life bringing them to the goal of their Christian faith: eternal union with God in heaven. It was this promise which Mr. Baker stated sustained and strengthened Mr. Bush not only in his last hours but as a sure and certain "beacon of light" during his long life and the various challenges and triumphs that comprised it as a soldier, husband, father, businessman, legislator, ambassador, government

agency head, vice president and ultimately president. While this was the path the former president was called to walk in his Christian faith, the same God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit offers us the same gift of himself on whatever path our life is set. And this assurance brings joy.

The second quality of joy, flowing from the first, is my call to share this joy, this peace with others. As the popular hymn “Let There Be Peace On Earth” sings: “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. With God as our Father we are family.” This is the joy which John the Baptist directs those who have taken his call to “reboot/repent” to heart. John tells them that now possessing the joy of God’s life within them, they, in turn, are called to live and act justly toward the person of the neighbor—clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, not extorting others, not overcharging others, not bring threats or false accusations. In speaking and living these and the other corporal and spiritual works of mercy the joy of our relationship with God flows from us to others offering them hope and joy. God-centered joy also calls us to look, acknowledge, and celebrate the ways God has birthed into our lives-- “counting our blessings” the “graced moments” the small or not so small miracles in our lives that bring not only a smile to our face but the enduring fire of God’s love to our hearts.

As we share the joy of these Advent and approaching Christmas days through our cards, carols and gatherings, hopefully it is more than a contrived or forced “holiday cheer”, but a joy stemming from knowing that God rejoices over each of us, over me, with gladness as he renews us in his love (Zph. 3:18).