

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Did you notice the rose candle this weekend? (Remember, it's *rose*, not *pink*!) This is the week in Advent that we focus on JOY! The first reading, from the prophet Zephaniah, starts off, "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel!" (Zephaniah 3:14) ... and that's just the first two sentences. The second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians calls us to "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). So much for the "Frozen Chosen!" We are called not to be lugubrious, but people of great joy! Remember, this is good news!

While the first two readings speak openly about joy – going along with the theme for the weekend – the Gospel is not so clear. People have been coming to St. John the Baptist for a baptism of repentance. There is a deep longing in their hearts. They don't know how to find that joy and peace that they want. John, in all his "craziness," seems to have found it... so people ask him how to get it. They ask what they are to do. Listen to his response:

"Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.... Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.... Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages."

Now the people ... were asking ... whether John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals." (Luke 3:11-16)

On the weekend that has joy as the focus, John shows us how to find that joy. It seems contrary to what we would normally think. Doesn't the world tell us that "things" will bring us joy? The natural tendency is not to go without, but to make sure you have enough... in fact, to have a cushion in case things go bad. I've seen so many people stressed about money, especially when going through tough times, yet John's advice is all about giving up – sharing clothing and food that we don't "need" (and John's idea of "need" is very different from our own, today! If you have two, give one away), not taking more than is our due, being satisfied with our wages.

It is an amazing thing that as much as we accumulate, and it doesn't bring us joy, we still keep trying to get more... as if it will bring us joy if we just had more of it. Rather, it is in accepting in gratitude what we have – whatever our situation – that we find true joy. Even John, who apparently has very little, isn't grasping at fame or prestige that is not his. He makes sure people know that he is not the Messiah, and that he isn't even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandal... now that's lowly!

Yet John finds peace and joy.

Maybe this is something we can focus on this season. Looking at our blessings and being grateful for them. Trusting that God will provide, and so being satisfied with our wages. Not seeking after things too great... the newest, the fastest, the sleekest...

Oh yes... back to that "Trusting that God will provide." That's really where our peace and joy comes, in *trust*. Remember, you are God's beloved child, and He is never going to leave you orphan. No matter what situation in which you find yourself, if you act in trust of God, He will take care of you. Now, of course, this doesn't mean doing anything you want and letting God take care of the mess... trusting God means doing what He wants us to do... not what we want to do. But trust also means that in giving up our wants for God's, we find our true joy. After all, God wants us to become who we were made to be... which is the only way to find joy.

During this season, may our hearts grow in trust of our Lord, turning our gaze from inward (egocentric) to outward (towards God and others), and in that find our true joy! Blessed Advent!