

## Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer

The Epistle for the Third Sunday in Advent is Philippians 4:4-7. In last week's reading of Philippians, Paul was encouraged by the support the Philippians were giving him. Now he returns the favor.

Paul urges them to rejoice. The "rejoice" means to be full of cheer. To be well off which brings about a calmness. In Paul it is bound up with his work as an apostle. It results from faith in Christ and is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy comes when Christ is proclaimed. Paul would say "I will not tire of speaking to you about rejoicing.

Paul wrote this, you will remember, in prison. He knew that our outer circumstances do not need to affect our inner feelings. Paul's joy came because he knew the Lord was with him no matter what happened. His repetition of the exhortation to rejoice suggested that he knew conditions at Philippi might make his encouragement seem a little unrealistic.

The stress of a hostile world gives rise to anxiety and fears about the future. Yet Paul challenges the Philippians and us to not be anxious "about anything!" Paul's answer to negative surroundings is prayer. Anxiety and prayer are two great opposing forces in Christian experience. Paul uses the word *supplication*. It means to make specific request for help.

Paul closes with *the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. This is an inner tranquility based on peace with God—the peaceful state of those whose sins are forgiven. The opposite of anxiety, it is the tranquility that comes when the believer commits all his cares to God in prayer and worries about them no more.

We can take all our worries and bring them before the Lord in prayer. As St. Peter put it, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). We can remember His loving care and let it supplant our worry.

As we believers often have situations in which we cannot be happy, we can always rejoice and delight in the Lord and His impact on our lives. Paul was not calling for smiles to be "painted on our faces," but for a genuine joy possible only in the Lord.

When life makes no sense, God's peace sustains and directs us. Peace acts like a guardian angel for our mental health.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for giving your peace that I can always rejoice even in the midst difficulties. Amen