

3rd Sunday in Advent

Cycle A-2025

This week, for the first time in years, I watched the beloved modern movie classic, “Forest Gump.” I forgot how good it was. I laughed, cried, was inspired, and led to reflect on the deeper meaning of life. The one thing that really struck me is that Forest Gump was a man of joy precisely because he possessed a deep sense of mission. He brought that sense of mission to everything he did: his love for running, his service in the Vietnam War, and his ownership of Bubba Gump Shrimp Corporation. Above all, Forest’s cultivated a sense of mission through the way he loved. He loved well. He loved Bubba, Lieutenant Dan, his mamma, and little Forest Gump. His greatest and overriding love was his beloved Jenny. As Forest himself proclaimed when they were kids, they “were like peas and carrots.” Forest’s greatest joy was in his mission to love.

As we celebrate Gaudete or Rejoice Sunday, our individual and collective joy is that the birth of our Brother and Savior Jesus Christ, draws ever nearer. In doing so, may we come to more fully recognize that our greatest joy lies in our daily and ongoing mission to love our greatest love, Jesus Christ. May we be like “peas and carrots” with Jesus. The phrase “peas and carrots” refers to how these two vegetables are often served together. On a soul level, it refers to being deeply united and inseparable, like two peas in a pod. Did you know that embracing this daily mission of love involves the same relational dynamics as sharing a deep love and bond with another person? Being like “peas and carrots” with Jesus involves daily thinking of Him talking to Him, listening to Him, spending time with Him, and savoring His presence. It also includes a desire to please Him, to be faithful to Him, to live for Him, to talk about Him, and to embody His presence in our lives.

Embracing our relationship with Jesus Christ can bring us a deep and abiding joy even amid the struggles, conflicts, and suffering, of daily living. We are able to

maintain and deepen our joy because we are fully enveloped and grounded in Christ's love and divine help. We have a deep soul sense we are never alone and that He will not leave us orphaned. He holds us in the palm of His hands. He walks with us. He carries us. He grieves with us while strengthening us with His divine grace as our Lord and Savior. If we truly believe that, and hold on to that faith, that brings us joy even amid our afflictions.

This relationship with Jesus Christ provides us with a profound joy as our personal identity is primarily grounded in His love. When our deepest identity comes from God's love, we have a stable and vibrant identity. We are stable and vibrant because our worth is grounded in God's constant love, not in the inconsistent love of people. We are stable and vibrant because our worth is not grounded in "what we have" and "who we know." It is rooted in "who" we are and "whose" we are. We are the beloved daughters and sons of God. We are stable and vibrant because our worth is not grounded in our physical and intellectual attributes. It is rooted in that we were created by and

for love. Love is everything! Love means everything! Love transforms everything! This is powerfully captured in the following reflection from a spiritual author: “If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; fortitude without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude. Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love.” May love underpin and inspire everything we say or do and everything we are. Finally, we are stable and vibrant because our worth is not grounded in personal and moral perfection. It is rooted in God’s faithful love as we continually strive to surrender the totality of ourselves to God, while seeking out, and trusting in, His abundant love and mercy, when we fall short. These stabilities and vibrancies bring us joy in a world of ever-changing allegiances and alliances. Not to

mention that ever-shifting interior landscape of our minds, hearts, and souls. The joy we encounter through our relationship with Jesus Christ, and having our identity deeply rooted in His love, leads us to a sense of mission to the world. I would like to center this mission in the personal epiphany of St Therese of Liseux, affectionately known as the Little Flower, who is a spiritual doctor of the church. As she personally grappled with her mission in life, the Lord Jesus revealed to her that her deepest mission was the vocation or calling to love. I will allow you to experience her deep joy at this discovery in her own words: “O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my vocation, my vocation is love. Yes, I have found my place in the church, and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place, in the heart of the church.” Jesus Christ gave St. Therese the vocation to love in the heart of the church as contemplative nun. I have also been given the vocation to love within the heart of the church as a parish priest. My vocation to love is centered on serving you and those churches I will be assigned to in the future.

But you as laity, have been given the vocation to love in the very heart of the world. In the home, workplace, and society. Some of you may even be called to the vocation of love within the heart of both the church and world. You live out your vocation to love whenever you, in a spirit of love, you embrace the daily relationships and responsibilities of marriage and family life and embrace the daily relationships and responsibilities of your career or community or church service. Your vocation to love also involves striving to provide a good and faithful Catholic witness within and outside your home; treating every person with dignity, respect, and equality; helping others to know, love, and serve the Lord through your prayers, words, actions, and evangelization; and by becoming the living embodiment of Jesus's loving and caring presence. An anonymous spiritual writer brings this together in the following short but thought-provoking summary or synthesis: "You're not just in that space, you're on assignment from heaven. God positioned you to carry a light that can reach someone that no homily ever could. Let the Holy Spirit flow through you. Someone's breakthrough is connected to your

obedience.” As Lady Gaga sings in “Always Remember Us This Way:” “It’s buried in my soul, like California gold. You found the light in me that I couldn’t find.”

Our daily vocation to love is to help other people unearth the priceless gold of God’s light and love in their own hearts and lives, and to encourage and help them to respond to it generously and faithfully.

Approaching life with this deep sense of mission from Jesus Christ, colors and enlivens the ordinary experiences and interactions of our daily existence with great spiritual meaning and significance.

By daily striving to be like “peas and carrots” with Jesus Christ, we ground our personal identity and lives, in Him. This helps us to continually build and grow an abiding sense of mission that is rooted in divine love and permeated with supernatural joy. And as the prophet Nehemiah proclaims, “The joy of the Lord is my strength.”(Nehemiah 8:10)