



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 15, 2024

St. James Catholic Church

*3909 Harrison * Kansas City, Missouri 64110*

"Small enough to know your name, big enough to make a difference."

Reflection from Denise Morris

The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, which is Latin for "rejoice." This week's readings exhort us to "shout for joy," "sing joyfully," "be glad and exalt," be "confident and unafraid," and "have no anxiety at all."

Ooof. Those are tall orders given a shifting political landscape at home, ongoing wars abroad, increasing division and exclusion everywhere, and personal situations and relationships we're all doing our best to navigate. I have to be honest ... I found myself wanting to admonish today's scripture writers to, "Tone down the positivity, please. People are dealing with tough stuff!"

As I scoured this week's scriptures to gather some practical advice on how to be grounded and glad and, yes, even find reasons to rejoice in the midst of daily drudgery, I unearthed three practical suggestions that I hope you find helpful:

- 1. Find reasons to be grateful.** (*"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God."* –Phil 4:6) Two years ago, I started a five-minute gratitude journaling practice in the morning and evening, and it has significantly shifted where I focus my energy and attention. Whereas before, I focused on the past or future, and what went wrong or what needed to change (in myself, others, institutions, the world), the gratitude practice has helped me focus on the present and what is good in life. Gratitude helps me find God's fingerprints throughout each day. I've noted the deep belly laughter of my students, an awe-filled sunset, appreciation for my body's innate ability to heal, and even the simple coral color of the flowers in my apartment—all of which bring me joy.
- 2. Find others to serve.** (*"Whoever has two cloaks must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise ... Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."* – Luke 3:11-13) In 2015-2016, I lived on the U.S.-Mexico border and crossed into Anapra, Mexico several times a week with religious sisters to volunteer at their clinic for kids with special needs. I will never forget the hospitality that these families offered in return. They generously shared what little they had, and without reservation. There was always room for another mouth at the table, and they never withheld anything. The paradox of service continues to be bafflingly beautiful to me: by focusing on others, we forget about ourselves for a bit, which creates a space for grace and ushers in joy.
- 3. Trust that no matter what happens, God is with you.** (*"...The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you have no further misfortune to fear."* –Zep. 3:15) Life plays by its own rules, and sometimes none at all. I have experienced the sudden loss of a parent, been betrayed by friends, and been indignant at the injustices that so many people in this world suffer. Yet, in my darkness and doubt that things could change, I remember that Jesus experienced the same, and so truly understands the emotions, longing and loneliness that accompany life. And that, perhaps, is the greatest reason for joy in this Advent season: to know that in less than two weeks, we welcome a God who understands and empathizes with us, a God who wants to walk with and beside us. Emmanuel — God with Us — will enter our hearts and homes once again, and that is definitely reason to rejoice!