

At this point, with Christmas drawing closer, there is no shortage of pressure and stress that could be filling our hearts and minds, distracting us from the great mystery of the Nativity of Our Lord. In the midst of all of the busyness, hectic schedules and personal struggles, the Church, through her liturgy, brings us the message: *Gaudete* "Rejoice". Notice that this is the imperative...a command. Rejoice because our days of darkness are close to their end as the rose candle is lit, rejoice dawn is nearly here, rejoice because the sun is rising, the Son is coming.

In the midst of all the pressure and stress, we as Christians are to rejoice. And because of the pressure and stress...that joy cannot be made up or faked...it comes from someone...it comes from Our Lord. Saint Paul VI in his Apostolic exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* "On Christian Joy" explains that our joy, properly understood, is a gift from the Triune God. Some try to find joy and happiness through other means such as pleasure, power, honor and glory, but our joy as Christians comes to us from God... the supreme good.

Our key to Christian joy is finding it in the Lord...worshiping Him....giving glory to Him. All our work, all the things that are stressing us out at this point in time...we can offer it to God as a sacrifice to Him for His greater glory. It is unfortunate that from time to time we get it wrong...through our sinfulness, we give glory to ourselves and find joy in worldly things. And that worldly joy does not leave us satisfied...it is fleeting...and leaves us empty...wanting more...more pleasure...more power...more honor...more glory.

We also might get it wrong for intellectual reasons. Christianity is unique among world religions, because it emphasizes more than just moral teachings and a way of life. It hinges on the identity of Jesus Christ, who was truly God and truly man. He fulfills the prophecies by showing us signs that would accompany the long expected Messiah, Christ the Lord...God - the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. If we get this wrong, then our Christian faith and the result of that faith, joy, is robbed is from us.

In a post-Christian society that boasts of tolerance and pluralism, we find many people that would consider Jesus to be a great moral teacher but find it difficult to believe that Jesus was God. C.S Lewis, although not Catholic but well on his way before his death, writes, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing

nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

If we are struggling at this time of year with finding true joy, we should ask ourselves what am I getting wrong. If it is the spiritual aspect, our sinfulness, you have this week throughout the Archdiocese a week of confessions...to confess your sins and to reignite the joy deep down in our heart. If it is the intellectual aspect, you should seriously consider whether or not you believe Jesus is God...and if he is God, do you believe that he can bring salvation to your house...that his power can change your life and give you strength and joy in the darkness of the world?

Our Lady of all joys, continue to assist and guide us in these days leading up to Christmas. In the midst of pressure and stress, in a dark and weary world, may your joy shine brightly and be a beacon of joyful hope in our lives.