

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT Year B      December 14, 2014

### Theme: Joyful Depression

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Today when I hear St. Paul tell the Thessalonians to **“Rejoice always”** I want to say back to him: *“I wish I could!”*

And when I hear the prophet announce that he **“rejoices heartily in the Lord and that God is the joy of his soul,”** an ugly, snide side of me wants to react and say: *“well, goodie for you.”*

I am not being mean in light of these awesome scripture writers, rather I am reacting as one who has long had to cope with chronic depression.

For most of my adult life and probably some of my adolescence I have had this mental health condition that inhibits the normal enjoyment and pleasures of life, most likely due to chemical imbalances in the brain.

Personally, I have struggled through cycles of depression that come and go on their own time schedule with varying degrees of severity, thankfully I have been able to continue my life and work with the help of medication and therapy.

For some people such depression can be much more severe, in some cases even requiring hospitalization, for others it is a daily, dark cloud that robs life of its simple joys and highs.

For many of us coping with depression, modern pharmaceuticals have helped us live more peaceably and fully despite our illness, yet it is always there sitting at the edge of every event, every celebration, every holiday.

Depression is the sort of disease that no matter how many times a spouse or parent or someone says “snap out of it” or “smile” or “pull yourself together” or “Rejoice always”:

I am here to tell you from experience, you can't do it.

Depression is not the same as a bad hair day or a crabby mood or a hang-over.

It doesn't go away with a good night's sleep or a couple of aspirins or even a little vacation.

Depression is a mental illness that traps a person within themselves in a spiral of negative thoughts; breaking out of this spiral of negativity often requires more energy than a beaten down depressed person can muster.

So what does this excursus on depression have to do with the Third Sunday of Advent, a Sunday traditionally associated with joy at the approaching Christmas Feast?

My point is to ask all of you to keep an open eye and vigilant heart for those among your family and friends who may be struggling with depression.

Keep an eye, not make a fuss – that's the last thing we depressed persons want; rather, keep an eye not to make the holiday celebrations tougher than they already are.

Those of us with depression can still enjoy family celebrations and parties, and feasts like Christmas and New Year's, but don't push.

If we sit quietly and don't say too much in the conversation, don't force us to participate beyond what we're able to do.

If we choose once in a while not to go ice skating or to the mall with the rest of the family, please don't make a big deal out of it in front of everyone.

However, if we never go, if we never participate, if we always want to stay at home, it's time to talk; it may be time to get us professional help.

And it's really important as the holiday approaches to pay attention to our older relatives and neighbors: depression among the elderly especially those with other illnesses is common and often untreated, according to some reports.

With the sorts of treatment now available, older folks do not need to spend their final years living in this dark negativity.

Advent looks forward to Christmas but also to the fullness of Christ's coming when the magnificent prophecy of Isaiah will be finally true for all people:

**“the poor will hear glad tidings,  
The brokenhearted will be healed,  
The captives will have liberty,  
The prisoners will be released.”**

And I might add: even the depressed will rejoice always!