Living Life with a Joyful Spirit

Around the rectory on my trees are a number of ornaments that were made by my grandmother Pat, who is one of the most joyful people I've ever known.

From my childhood, I always remember her as a person of joy. She'd love to see the grandkids and spend time with them. She loved being with family. She loved baking you cookies or a family meal. She'd walk a couple of blocks daily up to the corner drug store, Humboldt Pharmacy, where she worked for many years and people in the neighborhood would love to see her and say hello. Her life was never easy; being an orphan as a little girl, she grew up in Washington State, worked hard as a waitress, and met my grandpa Mike who had family back in Minnesota where they eventually moved and worked hard their entire life. And yet for all this, I can't recall her ever complaining; rather she is someone who would just lift your spirits. It reflected her deep faith life, as I'd frequently see her at prayer too. Her whole life reflected this faith as she brought people closer to God. Such is the power of joy.

Joy is a good thing, and this week's second reading begins with the words "Rejoice always." The Third Sunday of Advent is known as "Gaudete Sunday" or one of "rejoicing" as we use those words "rejoice" for the opening antiphon of the Mass. Hence the rose candle is lit, and the priest often wears rose colored vestments.

She certainly had plenty she could have complained about though, but she lived her life with so much joy. Not the feeling or "warm fuzzie" emotion so much as a deeper kind of spiritual joy. So how do we do this too?

One is remembering that God is with us and loves us so deeply. Evil is allowed to happen; God's plan isn't always clear but God is with us, and will never abandon us. We can always turn to Him through our Easter Sundays but also our Good Fridays.

Then there is action. With respect to action, it's how we lead our lives in terms of our relationships with people, and we can do so much to help them see God more clearly, and to be people of joy too. Its so many little things we do – calling someone on the phone and having a conversation; helping a son or daughter with homework; or spending time together as a family, that in and of themselves might seem so insignificant, over a lifetime, those little moments can do so much to foster faith.

Finally, while those gifts of kindness and love need to apply to those we know in our families, they also need to apply to the people that sometimes can get forgotten. So do little things, such as thanking someone for the job they are doing. Show patience on the road. If you get a chance, say "thank you" to a member of the military, a police officer, a teacher, a doctor or a nurse. Give someone a compliment. Build up rather than tear down. Do things without expecting something back in return, but simply out of love.

Life isn't easy, and we won't always be smiling or feeling all that joyful. But my hope is we do have a constant joy in our lives – a joy that reflects our faith, and permeates every day and causes us to do what we do for the glory of God, out of love for Him and one another.

Have a blessed week, Fr. Paul