

## What do you want for Christmas?

When I was a child, in the weeks before Christmas my friends and I would ask each other “What do you want for Christmas?” which meant what present we hoped to get from Santa Clause. It’s actually a good question, so I’ll ask you: “What do you want for Christmas?” Don’t answer too hastily because what I’m really asking you is “What do you want from God? What do you want from the Christ-child?”

Let me ask the question another way. What do you want more than anything else in the world? What does your heart most desire? Whatever we might hope to find under the Christmas tree, I posit that we all want the same thing for Christmas because we all want the same thing in life.

And what *is* that one thing that everybody wants? I sometimes ask school children this very question. Some children are very specific and say they want a big house or to be the world’s best tennis player. Some say they think everybody wants to be rich, successful or popular. Others delve deeper and say everybody wants peace or love. They’re onto something!

Let’s delve deeper yet and ask “but *why* do I or anybody want to be successful, comfortable, and loved? Why do I want *anything* for that matter? The answer: because I want to be happy! We only desire those things that we think will make us happy. This is basic philosophy going all the way back to Aristotle who said that happiness is the goal of human life.

Let’s go deeper yet and ask, “but why do we want to be happy? Why do we have within us a deep yearning for happiness?” I think it’s because God created us to be happy. God wants you and I to be happy and he has planted the desire for happiness deep in our souls.

Sometimes we find a certain amount of happiness from enjoying the world around us, from entertainments, and from the things we buy. But the joy quickly passes. We need something more. We find greater happiness from the people around us and the relationships we form with them. But as good as another person may be, people are imperfect and will sometimes disappoint us. We need something more.

Aristotle thought even greater happiness is achieved through the cultivation of virtue and the development of one’s moral character – and he’s right. But each of us is imperfect, so we sometimes disappoint ourselves. Something more is still needed, and that’s God. God is the one who gave us the desire for happiness; he’s the only one who can fully satisfy it. The person of faith can be happy at all times, even in the midst of difficulties, illness, and failure, because we know that God is always with us.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is our Emmanuel: God *with* us, sharing our human nature, our life, and our story. “He brings good news to the poor, binds up hearts that are broken, proclaims and gives liberty and freedom from our sins”. This joy does not end, even amid difficulties and sadness.

During our four weeks of preparing for Christmas, the Third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete Sunday”, from the Latin word “rejoice!” It’s a Sunday on which the prayers and Scripture

readings at Mass invite us to rejoice and be happy because with Christmas fast approaching the Lord is very near.

Interestingly, the Third Sunday of Advent – ‘Be Happy Sunday’ - also focusses on the austere figure of John the Baptist who calls us to prepare for the Lord’s coming with penance and the confession of our sins. If God is the source and fulfillment of our desire for happiness, then the greatest obstacle to true happiness is distancing ourselves from God which we do through sin. John the Baptist’s call to confess our sins is a call to return to the path of happiness.

True happiness doesn’t just fall into our laps like gifts falling down the chimney. We have to work at it: by using the things of this world in moderation; by developing our character; by forming good loving relationships; and most importantly by preparing our heart for God. This Christmas may we each receive from the Christ child our greatest desire – the true and enduring happiness that only God can give.