

## **Homily – LWML Sunday – 2020 – Philippians 4**

**Text: Philippians 4:4 – Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**

An older gentleman, with a briefcase in his hand, briskly walks down a nearly empty hall in a major school of learning. As he approaches the end of the hallway, he comes upon 3 students who are waiting for an upcoming class and are discussing the material for a test that they would be taking in that upcoming class. As they meet, he greets the students with a unique greeting. He grins and says, “Are we continually rejoicing in the Lord, brothers?” The response of the students is as one. They reply, “Yes sir. Absolutely.”

I’ve told this story many times over the years. It happened at the seminary in Ft. Wayne and I was one of the students who was worrying about the upcoming exam. The older gentleman was Dr. Walter A. Maier II; a blessed professor and pastor who has since gone home to be with his Lord and Savior. By way of his teaching in the classroom and through his greeting outside of class, he was echoing the sentiment of St. Paul. His greeting wasn’t meant to be weird or distinctive but instead was meant to remind us day after day, that we have a reason to rejoice every day of our lives. We are baptized children of God. Joy should always fill our hearts, effect what we do and color what we say. It truly is a blessing and gives us reason to declare, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”**

But, if some were to look at the life of St. Paul, they might ask, “What does he have to be so happy about?” When the blessed apostle is writing this letter, he’s in prison for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that isn’t all. Even though **he was a chosen instrument of Christ to carry His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel**, the way was by no means easy. He suffered **imprisonments, countless beatings, often near death**. He was **stoned, shipwrecked, adrift at sea, faced danger** on all sides, **had many a sleepless night**, and suffered from **cold and exposure**. Jesus had said that the blessed apostle **must suffer for the sake of His name**. He wasn’t kidding. So, where is there room to rejoice?

The redeemed saints in Philippi didn’t have it any easier. Without St. Paul’s presence among them, they were alone to face the challenges from inside and outside of the Church. Many began to **walk as enemies of the cross of Christ**, failing to see that **their end**

**is destruction, their god was their belly, and their glory was in their shame, with their minds set on earthly things.** Like the blessed apostle, they too would face rejection and even persecution for the sake of their faith and the Gospel. They didn't seem to have any more reason than St. Paul to express continual joy.

And yet, in the true joy of the Spirit, St. Paul proclaims, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”** Think of what he is saying. He tells them to **“rejoice”**. This isn't just wearing a slight grin. It is more than being a little happy. Most of all this is not something you want to keep to yourself. To truly **“rejoice”** first begins with a joy that wells up inside. It is a joy that is so intense that no matter what is happening around you, you just can't keep it inside. You have to sing it out and tell everyone about this joy so that they too can **“rejoice”** and have a share in this joy.

In his encouragement for the Philippian's to **“rejoice”**, St. Paul is saying, **“Don't lose heart. Don't allow the attacks of this sinful world to wear you down and silence your faith. ‘Rejoice’, loud and strong. Share the joy that has been showered upon you through the Holy Spirit. Share this Gospel joy with everyone and let your reasonableness be known to everyone.** Let them bear witness to the joy that is yours through faith so that they too may know the truth.”

As they sing for joy in an unbelieving world, notice the reason for this joy. They do not rejoice in this world and its treasures. They do not rejoice because they have found something within themselves or have done something worthy of praise. No, their joy is found **in the Lord**. Their truest joy is found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their truest joy rests in the knowledge that God's eternal grace rests upon them because Jesus carried their sins to the cross and that His holy, precious blood paid the price even for their most grievous sin.

St. Paul also reminds them that their Lord is not only very much alive but also that **the Lord is at hand**. Christ has promised that **where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is among them**. He is present in His body and blood given and shed for all the faithful at His table. And finally, His time is drawing near, the time for His return is coming soon. This day is not a day of dread or sorrow but a day for rejoicing. St. Paul reminds them all that this is

truly a reason to rejoice for, by the blood of Christ, **they shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Finally, St. Paul declares, **“Again I will say, rejoice.”** Here, we must remember that, when something is repeated in Scripture, it is to be emphasized. St. Paul’s exhortation to rejoice is not a passing encouragement or something they can skip over. Rather, it’s something that should rest firmly within their minds and be lived out in their lives, for, by faith, they have room to rejoice **in any and every circumstance, for, whether they are facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them.** Now, that’s a reason to rejoice.

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”** The call of the apostle still rings almost 21 centuries later. It calls out to every member of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. It is a reminder to everyone gathered here in the Lord’s House. And, on this day of celebration and thanksgiving, it especially extends to the ladies of the LWML. Every last one of us here today has a reason to rejoice; a reason to sing loud and long the praises of our God.

Like the world of St. Paul and the Philippian congregation, our world gives us very few reasons to rejoice. A virus splits our society into those who fear it and its effects on people versus those who feel it’s much ado about nothing; that even though people are dying because of this disease, it’s all a big political mess. People are protesting while looters destroy businesses. Wildfires and hurricanes destroy cities and lives. Any reason to rejoice here?

Where is the Church’s joy? Critics of the faith like to declare that Christianity takes all the fun out of life. Their idea is that a follower of Christ is not a joyful person but rather is one that is condemned to a life of doom and gloom while he awaits the final redemption. Even today, inside and outside of the Church, we have those who **walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame, because their minds are set on earthly things.** In the dirge of society, where is the joy of the Church?

But, what about here? Are we continually rejoicing in the Lord? As we come into God’s holy house, does the moment fill us with joy? Do we sing with King David, **“O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells”**

or is this just something we do? Do we commemorate our baptism, celebrate His blessed supper, sharing the joy with our brothers and sisters in Christ or are we just going through the motions? Do we rejoice in our ability to serve others, as we do through the LWML, or do we figure service is something for someone else to do? Again, I ask, “Are we continually rejoicing in the Lord?”

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”**

The child of God can always find a reason for rejoicing since our joy is not based on the ups and downs of everyday life. We can rejoice because the joy we celebrate is not based upon the temporary and sometimes artificial happiness which the world has to offer. No, our joy comes from that which the world cannot taint or remove. Our joy is found in knowing that your sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ. We have reason to rejoice when we realize that the Almighty God is concerned about what is happening in our life; that He loves and cares for us every single day of our lives.

Such is a joy that can never be taken away because it is a joy that is found **“in the Lord”**. This joy is always there because the Lord is always at hand. He is not so far off that we cannot reach Him nor is He so distant that He doesn’t know or care as to what happens to us. The Lord is present; present in His Word and sacrament, present just as He promised.

With our joy comes works that share this joy. It is a challenging thing to ask but needs to be asked. Today and each day, each one of us should ask, “How am I sharing this joy?” Here, we are sharing the joy with our fellow saints. Here, through organizations such as the LWML, our joy is shared as we assist those who carry the Word into places that we cannot go.

And as you return to your lives in this world, share the joy with your neighbors, family and friends. Make it so obvious that they want to know why you are so filled with joy. As they open the door, share the source of your joy. Share the love of God in Christ. Share the joy that forgives quickly and completely. Share the joy that serves without hesitation. Share the joy that faces every trial this world has to throw at you and declare with all confidence, **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

AMEN