

“She Gives Most Who Gives with Joy (Mother Teresa).”
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The rose-colored candle we lit this morning is sometimes referred to as the “pink candle.” It looks pink anyway. However, its rightful color and symbolism is in its actual rose color. It has to do with a long history in the Catholic Church. A practice of the pope giving a pink rose to a citizen on a certain day in Lent eventually crossed over into the culture of Advent. In time the meaning shifted away from the idea of a purple candle of penance in favor of a color, like a rose, that could represent joy. Traditionally, this third Sunday has been the Sunday of Joy.

The theme of “joy” that the candle represents something we say a lot. God is good all the time, the saying goes. But life is not. And that’s why we need God. It is also the reason we need each other.

During the Advent season we gather joy around us with a desire to give tangible things, even to stretch our budgets, just to give to others in our circle of relationships. (the presents in the shop—there are no presents under our tree that do not have a name on it) The season for Advent now is a time for such joyful living and giving—although we agree that all may not be right with the world.

At the same time there is a way to live that believes in another reality just as real and just as relevant as the one we see around us. I find a handle on that idea about the other joyful reality in Martin Buber’s idea about what he called the “I and Thou.”

Buber (1878–1965) was a prolific author . . . whose writings—mostly in German and Hebrew—ranged from interests like Jewish mysticism to . . . biblical studies, . . . [to] education, politics, and even art. Most famous among his . . . writings is the short but powerful book *I and Thou* (1923).¹ Though I is a little hard to explain here, Buber forwarded the idea that we humans do have clear boundaries with things and yet, our finest moments are to be found in our human ability to diminish boundaries between other humans (not as things) but like us. The most important thing is that Buber believed humans find meaningfulness in relationships with others and that means each other and God, the eternal thou, [or holy other].”² Why that matters is because, with our procession through the Advent days we emerge from a penitential lamentation about a world in shadows and emerge on the side of hopefulness, and with that joy.

We are right now intently turning our thoughts and actions toward Christmas

1 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/>

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_and_Thou

just 9 days from now. Think about all you have planned between now and then. Around the world, brothers and sisters of faith, families and friends--we all anticipate the up-tick of a holy "joy one only finds in the eternal Thou." The eternal You, God, who made us and are always calling us to you!

We could say it in a narrative that sounds like this. Just nine more days to go. We see hosts of people gathering nearer to "the already come" and the "not yet." We memorialize the nativity story in plays and storytelling. We expect to line up with a thin moment at any time where we will, too, get to hear the angels sing across the heavens, "Glory to God." And, we expect that all earth will see and hear it together.

In Advent we are practicing fresh and new ways to draw circles that do not leave others out, but how to configure all-encompassing circles that include all people everywhere--just like the ones God has been drawing all throughout creation's history. Today brings with it the highest hope of unfolding of Advent and with it joy!. Think about it.

Most of us have been wrapping presents as capably and quickly as we can. Like machines we have gone into store after store carrying out what we can buy, rushing home as quickly as we can, wrapping (or hiding) what we bought. We put it under the tree, then go again to do the same. If not going and getting, then we are searching and clicking. Like worker bees, we are off to a field of flowers to return again and again with nectar to share with our clans, back and forth we go until the season runs its course. To say the least, even if we grumble a bit about it, we find joy in it.

Each present is a glimpse into the delight or joy of our giving of ourselves to others. We are purely pointing out things like love, grace, forgiveness, affection, compassion, peace, joy, and hope. Not one of us gives "things" grudgingly because we know how important relationships are. Each gift begins with the name of a person whose life matters to us and to God. Behind each gift is the motivation to pass on your own joy to another. Wouldn't you say that joy, then, is a two-way street in some respects? Let me illustrate.

Remember Mother Teresa? She was the one who said, "She Gives Most Who Gives with Joy." The Albanian-Indian was a very small lady with a ginormous heart for God and others. From her position as a teacher and head mistress at a school, she imagined the destitution of the poor of Calcutta, India. And yet she was able to re-imagine them in another joyful kind of way—not in their destitution but in God's grace. They, too, were people who deserved God's love and grace, too. The poor were not objects in the streets, but others whom the holy other God created—just like her, and just like us. "Keep the joy of loving God in your heart," she would say to others, "and share this joy with all you meet especially your family. Be holy – let

us pray." she was often heard to say. In one of her prayers she said to God, "help us, O loving Father, to take whatever you give and give whatever you take with a big smile."

Finally, this Advent Sunday is an eagerness for the coming of the Lord Jesus when we know that all relationships then will be made new. It is an appeal for us not to squander our energy on ourselves or our disappointments with others, but to invest our resources from a kingdom of goodness and life. In so doing, others find meaningfulness and in turn find a relationship with whom Buber called the "eternal Thou."

Writers Fredrick and Mary Ann Brussat challenge us now: "Give yourself permission to rejoice with others. . . find joy in another's joy . . . give yourself permission to feel good about helping others . . . If you are not quite there yet, you may need to take some initiative. (what I did "when calls the heart." I think there are four ways you can do this:

1. If you have sinned against God it is time to renew your relationship to him. That will bring you immediate joy!
2. If you have sinned against your neighbor, it is time to see a new relationship with him or her, or them. That will bring you a lifetime of joy!
3. If you are living your God-given days as though they are your own, it is time to remember that you were created for God's glory and not for your own egomania. That correction will bring you joy every time you look into the heart of your own soul!
4. An old proverb says, "If you frown on the outside long enough, eventually you'll grow a frown on the inside, too." If you have become critical and judgmental, it is time for you to rediscover grace. "It will bring joy because you will find it in living rightly, treating others rightly, and I promise a fresh wind of the spirit will wend its way through your life.

As Saint Teresa of Calcutta . . . kn[ew] "She gives most who gives with joy."³ Repeat this after me-- Keep the joy of loving God in your heart, and share this joy with all you meet especially your family. Be holy – let us pray:

³ *Spiritual Literacy*, 245.

