

# **Solemn Novena to St. Ann**

## **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**July 18, 2024**

### **Preaching of Rev. Luis Daniel Guivas Gerena, C.P.**

Before I begin, I would like to recall Father Nelson's initial words from yesterday when he invited us to remember three basic attitudes during the Novena. First, he invited us to have a generosity of spirit that may lead us and help us to keep God at the center of our thoughts. He then invited us to an openness and an emptiness of heart, allowing God to fill all our needs. And third, he invited us to silence, both inner and outer silence, so that we can hear the voice of God speaking to us. So, let us during these days allow God to guide our hearts and our minds in the many ways that he wishes to do so, whether it's by words or thoughts, sharing with one another, enjoying our time together, walking around. Let us allow God to be with us and in us.

Yesterday, Father Nelson began our Novena celebration talking about gratitude. As we look back at the history of this Novena, there are so many testimonies of the countless blessings that God has poured down on us, many miracles in different ways, many friendships that have developed throughout the years, many beautiful memories and traditions, and so many other blessings, which I'm sure you all know much better than I do. And we look back at them with grateful hearts.

But our gratitude to God is also for the many blessings that we personally have received in our own lives, our families, our friends, our health, our job, our faith, and everything else that God has blessed us with. We come together to celebrate 100 years of the history of this solemn Novena to St. Ann, but we also acknowledge and celebrate the loving presence of God in our own life. We're grateful in so many ways, and as Father Nelson mentioned yesterday, grateful people are joyful people, which leads us to my theme for today.

We are called to be people of joy. I think, first of all, it's important to distinguish the difference between joy and happiness. They're sometimes confused as the same thing, but they are not.

Happiness is an emotion often triggered by specific events or moments, like when we get a good grade in school or reach a goal or buy a new car or house or dress or shoes or whatever. These are all positive situations that make us feel good, but only for a short time, and that is happiness.

Joy, on the other hand, is more than an emotion. It's a state of mind that allows us to feel fulfilled, like when we do volunteer work or when we do something that brings us peace and happiness, but also brings us into closer to God, even things that we don't know and even when things are not the way we would like them to be. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, we are called to rejoice in the Lord always, and he reassures us that we need to rejoice and to trust that the Lord is nearby. Knowing that the Lord is near, we learn to trust God in his mysterious ways.

Oftentimes, even though it may sound odd, we can find joy in our suffering. Yes, suffering and joy can coexist. We see, for example, in the Bible, how St. Paul writes so often about rejoicing amid his sufferings for Christ, and he tells us that he is sustained in his tribulations by his hope and love for God.

It's not just about suffering or seeking to suffer for the sake of suffering. That's called masochism, and that is not what God wants for us. It's not from God.

It's about finding meaning and purpose in our sufferings. It's about finding the presence of God in our human reality. I think, for example, of so many men and women, young and old, who are in hospital beds with some illness, and yet they find joy and peace in their tribulations through their faith.

Or those who are going through a rough patch with their family and still find the hope and the joy to continue loving them and protecting them, trusting that God is with them. Today's Gospel readings offer us this beautiful image used by Jesus of the woman giving birth to a child, reminding us that the pain and suffering that we experience are only temporary and that, as the famous saying goes, this too shall pass. And the joy that comes with our sufferings will last forever because it comes from God's loving presence in our lives.

Let us remember another one of Father Nelson's phrases from yesterday when he said, look back and thank God. Look forward and trust God. Look above and praise God. Look around and serve God. Look inside and find God. So, as we go about our day today, let us think about our joys and sorrows with an open and sincere heart.

As I look back, what memories bring joy and gratitude to my heart? How is God inviting me to rejoice in him as I look forward into the future, as I present my plans to him? What are the things that take away the joy from my life? As I look above, around, and inside of me, what are the things that give me joy? Let us remember that no matter the circumstances we're going through, there is always a reason for joy in our life. Whatever we do, wherever we are, we are called to rejoice. The love of God will always sustain us.

Again, there is always a reason to rejoice. All we need to do is find the beauty, the hidden beauty of life, the small things in life that bring us joy and cling on to that. So, I want to conclude my reflection using St. Paul's words from the letter to the Romans as a short prayer over you.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us always try to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Amen.