

Rejoicing Always is Possible

by Father John Catoir JCD -4/23/17

Having just gone through Lent and Easter, we've seen the stark reality of the cross followed by the glorious manifestation of the resurrection. We are now living in the joyful season of Easter. But I ask you, is it realistic to ask anyone to be joyful in this crazy world of ours over us? The answer is a definite YES!

There will always be crosses, and yet we are called to live joyfully through all the drudgery and pain of life. We all suffer physical and emotional pain of one kind or another: our bodies ache, people disappoint, financial woes engender fear, the possibility of war persists, but despite this, we are still called to live joyfully.

St. Paul, who suffered mightily in his day, urged us to rejoice always because of the knowledge of God's love. How do we know that God loves us? We know it on faith. Jesus Christ told us to call God "Our Father." Doesn't every father want his children to be happy? That's why St. Paul said, "*Rejoice always, and be grateful in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus*", (I Cor. 5: 16). He took this magnificent idea from Jesus, who at the last supper said, "*I have told you all these things that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete*," (John 15:11).

Forgive me if I repeat this theme again and again, but my readers urge me to keep it up. I appeal to Pope John Paul II for confirmation. He wrote, "Christ came to bring joy, joy to children, joy to parents, joy to families and friends, joy to workers and scholars, joy to the sick and elderly, joy to all humanity. In a true sense joy is the keynote message and the recurring motif of the Gospels...Go therefore and become messengers of joy."

Our response ought to be, "*Yes I will Lord. I will be glad, and filled with joy, because of you.*" (Psalm 9:2), but too often we fall short of our high calling. Recently Bishop Robert Barron wrote about the strict moral code that the Church proclaims in matters of sexuality. The reason we push for excellence in every area of human life is because the Church exists to create saints. Many Catholics say the Church should scale back on these rigid standards, but Christ call us higher. Jesus said, "Be ye perfect."- Matt. 5:48. We all know the heartbreak and suffering that comes from unbridled sexuality. Mediocrity and irresponsibility always lead to misery and death.

Of course, we are weak and sinful. Of course, we need Divine mercy just to survive spiritually from day to day, but we also need Christian ideals that call us to nobility and holiness. Mediocrity is not an option.

"Rejoice always," is a call to perfection. We need to accept spiritual joy as a realistic goal. When Jesus told us to, "*Love one another as I have loved you*," he knew it would involve the cross. Wherever there is love, there is service; wherever there is service there is sacrifice, and wherever there is sacrifice there is the cross. Joy and the cross are not contradictory, they are in fact complimentary. Jesus knew that the only way to find true joy was by emptying oneself in loving service.

"The greatest honor you can give to Almighty God is to live joyfully because of the knowledge of his love," (Julian of Norwich).