

# Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

The Virtue of Joy

July 07, 2019

Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.

## Part I

The Virtue of Joy is the theme of the readings today. The Joy of the Good News. The Joy that comes from realizing at a deep level that God loves us; that God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us, as St. Augustine taught.

“Holy Joy,” as it reads in our Opening Prayer – for ‘God has rescued us from slavery to sin.’

In the First Reading, from the prophet Isaiah, the Israelite people are encouraged to

“REJOICE,” for God’s promises to Jerusalem have come to fulfillment, her trials are over and a new era has begun. The people of Jerusalem live the experience of liberation as the contented children of a devoted and comforting mother.

“Let all the earth cry out to God with joy,” extols the Psalmist. “Shout joyfully to God. for his tremendous deeds, for his wonderful works.”

In the Second Reading, St. Paul finds his happiness in the saving work of Christ – of which the cross is the visible expression. Personal transformation into Christ, makes each of us “a new creation.” Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit is at work in us, Paul teaches, and that brings the believer great Joy.

Inner transformation is what any disciple of Christ needs for his or her mission. The “72” that Jesus sends out ahead of him “to every town and place he intended to visit” had been transformed by the Spirit. They needed this Grace in order to be able to proclaim the “Kingdom of God” to those they met on their mission; in order to proclaim Good News, Great News!!- of liberation and salvation!

Jesus tells them that the “harvest is abundant” – that is, people are hungry, hungry for soul food, ready for conversion. They are to “travel lightly” for God will provide what they need. The “72” (and us) are to

be Jesus' hands to cure; his heart to care; his ears to listen; his mouth to speak words of encouragement and peace. Joyful enthusiasm marks the disciple's return from their successful mission.

## **Part II**

Last week I made my annual eight-day retreat. It was a treasured time, which can best be described as – “8 days of Joy!” I had planned to do the retreat by using certain Psalms to inspire my prayer. Psalms like Number 42: “As a deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for God,” and Number 23: “The Lord is my shepherd.”

What happened – with the help of the Psalms – was a wonderful prayerful consideration of the various ways I have experienced the presence of God in my life, going back to childhood:

- key people, who have helped me to grow in my faith beginning with my mother and father
- key Jesuit mentors, going back to High School and up to the present
- special lay people, who have supported me as a Jesuit emotionally, spiritually, and financially over the years of my Jesuit life
- the places where I have lived, as a Jesuit – most unexpected, like San Diego, Cluny and Calgary, Las Vegas, and now Spokane
- the cultures where I have been privileged to serve: African-American (San Francisco), Mexican (Tijuana), First Nations (Canada), and Latino (Las Vegas)
- key Graces that have healed me, freed me, and enabled me to go wherever God asked.

When I entered the Jesuit Novitiate, at the age of 24, I was firmly convinced that I would never have the following:

- A car to use for ministry
- Anything to do with the business world
- Women as friends

Wrong!!! On all three counts.

As I reflected on the retreat, on my life, I realized that behind it all – the people, the places, the cultures, the ministries was the all-encompassing and amazing LOVE of God.

### **Part III**

This great LOVE is what links us to one another. We have each experienced God's marvelous deeds, God's providential care, and the mysterious mercy that forgives our past moral misdeeds and keeps calling us closer. God has been both a "comforting mother" and an "encouraging father" to us on our faith journey.

And that is why we can REJOICE each day for the blessings we have received, as we look forward in hope to the future for as Jesus said to the 72 disciples (and to us):

"Your name is written in heaven."

Amen

Father Max Oliva, S.J.