

To procure the same joy for others

For a christian, joy is an act of faith in God's word. The words 'joy' and 'rejoicing' are used 295 times in the Bible. In the common experience, joy is born from life and finds its plenitude in love. Life itself is joy.

Joy is a state of complete life, an irrepressible satisfaction and a motive of rejoicing, joy and contentment. It generally shows itself in a person's exterior aspect, in the expression of one's face, in gestures and so on. It is sometimes accompanied with spontaneous and liberating actions and behaviours : to show a great joy, to be mad with joy. More concretely, 'to be the joy' of someone is to be a source of happiness and solace for someone else: this child is his parents' joy, it is a joy to work with him.

I- Joy and happiness, similar but not identical.

Joy and happiness are interchangeable terms, even if they don't exactly cover the same thing.

The first comes from inside and demands a constant 'practise'. 'Why do you seek joy outside yourself? Don't you know that you can't find it outside your heart?' the Indian poet Tagore was writing. Interior joy doesn't know disappointment, since it needs nothing to show itself and so can't be lost or be transformed into regret. It is the art of 'being' in joy with what we possess, either from a material point of view or from the point of view of conscience. To be in joy means to be what we are, and to obtain this, knowing oneself is enough. Joy is a powerful mover which drives to make life better by being interested, open to the world, creative in its manifestation. Not to be satisfied with what is contingent, to tend always to wider horizons and to feel oneself supported by an invisible presence are a mover so that joy may last in us, in the depths of ourselves.

The second ('happiness') is produced outside ourselves. It comes from a satisfied wish, from an obtained success, from being freed from an anxiety or pain. After having lived this experience, the person is happy to have reached the aim.

This happiness lasts as long as it is not threatened by some afflictions, pains, new temptations always possible and lurking .

II- Joy in the letter to the Philippians.

Paul's letter to the Philippians has been called '*hymn to joy*'. The apostle invites to a full joy without being satisfied with a temporary happiness. He praises the collaboration of all for the Gospel; he is glad to announce the Gospel though he is in prison; he reminds of the importance of being present to one another; he encourages unity in intention and remaining united in action.

- A motivated joy. '**Every time I pray for you all, I always pray with joy for your partnership in the gospel from the very first day up to the present.**' (1:4-5)
- A paradoxical joy. '**But what does it matter? Only that in both ways, whether with false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and for that I am happy.**' (1:18)
- A joy willing to help. '**This much I know for certain, that I shall stay and stand by you all, to encourage your advance and your joy in the faith.**' (1:25)
- A nourished joy. '**Make my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind.**' (2:2)
- A tried joy. '**Indeed, even if my blood has to be poured as a libation over your sacrifice and the offering of your faith, then I shall be glad and join in your rejoicing and in the same way, you must be glad and join in my rejoicing.**' (2:17-18)
- A joy passed to others. '**So I am sending [Epaphroditus] back as promptly as I can so that you will have the joy of seeing him again, and that will be some comfort to me in my distress. Welcome him in the Lord, then, with all joy; hold people like him in honour.**' (2:28-29)
- A praised joy. '**So then, my brothers and dear friends whom I miss so much, my joy and my crown, hold firm in the Lord, dear friends.**' (4:1)
- A joy which is testified. '**Always be joyful, then, in the Lord; I repeat, be joyful. Let your good sense be obvious to everybody. The Lord is near.**' (4:4-5)
- A caring joy. '**As for me, I am full of joy in the Lord, now that at last your consideration for me has blossomed again; ...**' (4:4-5)

I leave to the personal or community reflection to discover the occasions and causes of joy for Paul. To ask ourselves what we must do to feel the same joy.

III- 'Rejoice in the Lord always (...) for he is at hand' (Ph. 4:4-5)

On May 8th 1975, Paul VI published the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*. The points treated by the Pope are 1) the need for joy in the hearts of all men. 2) Christian joy announced in the Old Testament. 3) Joy according to the New Testament. 4) Joy in the hearts of Saints. 5) A Joy for the whole people. 6) Joy and hope in the hearts of the young. 7) The pilgrims' joy in the Holy Year.

This is a forgotten Apostolic Exhortation, never quoted, though always for the present day! It would be good to take it up again, to read it and interiorize it, specially in this historical moment when we are threatened by the current wars, and seized by the fear of sophisticated weapons, either nuclear or long-range missiles.

As Religious of the Sacred Heart of Betharram, on the day of our religious profession, we have expressed our will to live the joy of consecration in the Community, and to

procure the same joy to others. Still today, *Gaudete in Domino* challenges us. I will quote some extracts of it, taken from paragraph 1: they can't but suggest questions.

In the first part of the Apostolic Exhortation, Paul VI is writing :

'Our invitation essentially calls ... to an interior renewal and reconciliation in Christ (...) When he awakens to the world, does not man feel, in addition to the natural desire to understand and take possession of it, the desire to find within it his fulfillment and happiness? As everyone knows, there are several degrees of this "happiness." Its most noble expression is joy, or "happiness" in the strict sense, when man, on the level of his higher faculties, finds his peace and satisfaction in the possession of a known and loved good. Thus, man experiences joy when he finds himself in harmony with nature, and especially in the encounter, sharing and communion with other people. All the more does he know spiritual joy or happiness when his spirit enters into possession of God, known and loved as the supreme and immutable good. Poets, artists, thinkers, but also ordinary men and women, simply disposed to a certain inner light, have been able and still are able, in the times before Christ and in our own time and among us, to experience something of the joy of God.

But how can we ignore the additional fact that joy is always imperfect, fragile and threatened? By a strange paradox, the consciousness of that which, beyond all passing pleasure, would constitute true happiness, also includes the certainty that there is no perfect happiness. The experience of finiteness, felt by each generation in its turn, obliges one to acknowledge and to plumb the immense gap that always exists between reality and the desire for the infinite.

This paradox, and this difficulty in attaining joy, seem to us particularly acute today. This is the reason for our message. Technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual. Money, comfort, hygiene and material security are often not lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness unhappily remain the lot of many. These feelings sometimes go as far as anguish and despair, which apparent carefreeness, the frenzies of present good fortune and artificial paradises cannot assuage. Do people perhaps feel helpless to dominate industrial progress, to plan society in a human way? Does the future perhaps seem too uncertain, human life too threatened? Or is it not perhaps a matter of loneliness, of an unsatisfied thirst for love and for someone's presence, of an ill-defined emptiness? On the contrary, in many regions and sometimes in our midst, the sum of physical and moral sufferings weighs heavily: so many starving people, so many victims of fruitless combats, so many people torn from their homes! These miseries are perhaps not deeper than those of the past but they have taken on a worldwide dimension. They are better known, reported by the mass media—at least as much as the events of good fortune—and they overwhelm people's minds. Often there seems to be no adequate human solution to them.

This situation nevertheless cannot hinder us from speaking about joy and hoping for joy. It is indeed in the midst of their distress that our fellow men need to know joy, to hear its song. We sympathize profoundly with those over whom poverty

and sufferings of every sort cast a veil of sadness. We are thinking in particular of those who are without means, without help, without friendship—those who see their human hopes annihilated. More than ever they are present in our prayers and our affection. We do not wish to overwhelm anyone. On the contrary, we are looking for the remedies capable of bringing light. In our view, these remedies fall into three categories.

People must obviously unite their efforts to secure at least a minimum of relief, well-being, security and justice, necessary for happiness, for the many peoples deprived of them. Such solidarity is already the work of God, it corresponds to Christ's commandment. Already it secures peace, restores hope, strength, communion, and gives access to joy, for the one who gives as for the one who receives, for it is more blessed to give than to receive. [...]

There is also needed a patient effort to teach people, or teach them once more, how to savor in a simple way the many human joys that the Creator places in our path: the elating joy of existence and of life; the joy of chaste and sanctified love; the peaceful joy of nature and silence; the sometimes austere joy of work well done; the joy and satisfaction of duty performed; the transparent joy of purity, service and sharing; the demanding joy of sacrifice. The Christian will be able to purify, complete and sublimate these joys; he will not be able to disdain them. Christian joy presupposes a person capable of natural joy. These natural joys were often used by Christ as a starting point when He proclaimed the kingdom of God. [...]

Who does not recall the words of Saint Augustine: "You have made us for Yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You"? It is therefore by becoming more present to God, by turning away from sin, that man can truly enter into spiritual joy. Without doubt "flesh and blood" are incapable of this. But Revelation can open up this possibility and grace can bring about this return. Our intention is precisely to invite you to the sources of Christian joy. And how could we do this, without ourselves becoming attentive to God's plan, listening to the Good News of His love?

The Rule of Life questions us.

Happy to live as witnesses of Jesus Christ, source of our joy,...

- do we give ourselves "totally to bring to others that same joy"? (RL. 11)
- Do we wish to share in the "joys and hopes, the sadness and the anguish of men? (RL. 18)
- Do we remain sensitive to the needs of our contemporaries in close and humble contact with their lives? (RL. 18)
- Do we find our joy in making "a free gift of our lives" to God "which is a real sacrifice"? (RL. 30)
- Let us remember that without an authentic spiritual life [...] a joyful perseverance is unviable. (Cf. RL. 41).



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