

The Joy of Serving

The dictionary definition of the word joy indicates that it is a sentiment of intense happiness, what makes arise in the individual a rich state of well-being. We can say, therefore, that joy is an important element for good mental health.

Quite a few interesting scriptural quotes concerning joy exist. Here is a small sample:

- From the Gospel according to John, 6:16: *that my joy remains in you*
- From the 1st Letter of John: 5:11: *that your joy be full*
- From the Book of Nehemiah: 8:10: *for the joy of the Lord is your strength*

We can conclude that intimacy with God has a lot to do about finding joy in our service. Indeed, to fully understand the idea of joy in serving, I suggest that we revisit the 12 major elements that are of great importance to Christian life.

Our Christian life is based on the 2-part fundamental teaching of the Lord: **Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself.** This is the filter that we must use on a daily basis as we proceed with life.

In the Baptism ceremony, the celebrant, once the ritual with water is done, makes a cross on the forehead of the baptized person with Chrism and indicates in prayer that the baptized person is now a full-fledged disciple of Christ, following the Lord in his 3-part vocation as **Priest, Prophet and King.**

Yes, every baptized person is in a very real sense, a priest, called upon to link his or her corner of the world to God Almighty. This mirrors the fundamental function of the ordained priest to be a bridge between the here and now and eternity. Two small examples indicate the power of the baptized laity:

- In an emergency, the baptized Christian can validly baptize someone.
- Present with a dying person, when no ordained priest is available to provide the sacrament of anointing of the sick, the baptized person can validly call upon God to pardon the sins of the dying person.

The baptized person is also a Prophet. This means courageously standing up for what is right and just. It also means to strive to properly explain one's Faith. It means that making the world a better place is not merely an option, but an imperative.

The Kingly vocation points to the responsibilities that we have. They must always be accomplished through the filter of the two-point teaching of the Lord, as I said earlier: to love God and to love neighbour. Also we are to integrate in one's life the teaching from Jesus himself, that leadership is service.

We have considered five of the 12 points. The seven remaining are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, received in the great sacrament of Confirmation.

The first two are very important. The wisdom to know clearly what is to be done and the courage to do it. To make these two gifts work in tandem is something we must strive to always do. Then comes prudence, a gift that becomes ever more precise as we use it throughout life. It helps us not

to jump to conclusions, to take the time to find out what is right and just. The gift of intelligence helps us study and learn what our vocation in life requires. It gives us a wise curiosity. The gift of understanding makes us see the connections and solutions that bring about growth and happiness. It helps us appreciate the gifts that others bring.

The sixth gift is reverence. It helps us make every ordinary occasion of life an extraordinary event in the adventure of life. It fosters a clearer picture of our environment.

Finally, piety gives us the understanding of our great need to foster, on a daily basis, our intimate love relationship with God. To cherish the sacraments and the liturgy. To understand that through the practice of Faith we become fully human, made in the image of God.

The fully alive Christian should be able to serve with joy, but we do not live in an ideal world. Many are those who consider the idea of joy in serving as far-fetched, if not impossible. The reality in which we swim is the Secular World. For many what I have spoken is just so much nonsensical talk.

Why is it so? To better understand this Secular World, I suggest we look at four areas where the Christian conception and the secular are at odds: The notion of God, the understanding of the Bible, Institutional Religion and the problem of Evil.

We are surrounded by practical atheism. Usually this is bred by sheer ignorance. Regrettably often the idea of God held by some believers is far from solid. Our God is not some power always ready to judge and punish, akin to the Force in *Star Wars*, but rather a God, who, in the words of St Irenaeus, has his glory in the human person fully alive. He is the Trinitarian God who is intimately close to us in the Eucharist and whose Holy Spirit empowers us.

What so many ignore about the Bible is that it is a collection of books, each with its own style. It contains poetry, allegorical texts, stories to teach, audio-visuals and also several books of actual history. If we do not keep all this in mind, the Bible is next to useless.

Our Secular World sees religion as the enemy of science and a continuous source of violence. One has to say loud and clear that solid study of history shows that Christianity has continuously fostered good science. The Church being composed at every age of saints and sinners, has in the past, made some mis-steps but the overall progress has been towards a world ever closer to the goal of our Creator and Lord.

What many see as the greatest obstacle to belief is the problem of Evil. In short why does a loving God permit suffering on a gigantic scale. The believer's answer is above all the cross of Christ. God gives us freedom and so He must be patient when bad things occur. His Providence watches over us and he relies on good people to pick up the pieces. You can see how terribly important the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is. A text to ponder is the answer that God gives to Job (see the Book of Job, chapters 38 to 41)

We must be aware of the Secular World and cooperate with those elements that are authentic. Our Faith must guide us to be the light that may steer humanity back to its true destiny.

In the year 2000, Bruce Wilkinson of the Evangelical Church, published a small book entitled *The Jabez Prayer*. The Bible tells us about Jabez in 1Chronicles 4:10: *Jabez called on the God of Israel: If you truly bless me you will extend my lands, your hand will be with me, you will keep harm away.*

What is interesting about Jabez is that he is not running away from responsibility but rather, asking that more opportunities to serve be granted, and he wants God very much in his life.

I suggest that to have joy in serving we must see reality somewhat like Jabez does, knowing ourselves and our capacities, yet realizing that with God's help, the impossible becomes possible.

In 1955, a French priest, Gaston Courtois, involved in the Catholic Boy Scout movement, published a book entitled *L'École des Chefs*. In the book he outlines 15 topics essential to become a good leader. His third topic is as follows:

Having faith in the importance and the beauty of the task at hand

I believe that the insight provided by Father Courtois is very pertinent to our consideration of the theme *joy in serving*. To have such joy we must truly believe that what we are doing is not only important, but is clearly what our God and Eternal Friend wishes us to do. With such a belief, it is inevitable that joy will be in serving.