

The Joy of the Lord: “Only in God, there is fulness of joy”

Once a monk went to a beach for silence and meditation. He saw a scorpion being carried away by the waves in the ocean. He bent down and tried to save the scorpion. But he was stung by the scorpion and soon he put the scorpion back to the waters and began to nurse his finger. After a moment, he again bent down and tried to save the scorpion, but he was stung a second time. He threw the scorpion back into the waters. He went down for the third time to save it, still again was stung. A man who was watching this said to the monk: “are you out of your mind? You were tempted to save the scorpion three times and it stung you thrice. Yet, you are trying to save it. The monk turned and said: “It’s the nature of the scorpion to sting. While it is the nature of the monk to love, to save”. B&S, this story tells us that you should not allow the bitterness of someone to take away your sweetness.

“The Joy of the Lord is my strength” -*Neh. 8:10*. Rejoice, I tell you again, rejoice: Ph. 4.4 -sing!

Is there anyone present here who wouldn’t desire a ‘joyful life’? I think this is one of the fundamental desires/goals in our life; “Joyful life”. Then, what is the key to a truly “Joyful life”? How do we understand “joy of the Lord”? Today’s Gospel speaks about the way to Joyfulness and focuses on what is real joy in the Lord, and how can we make it our own.

First, we need to distinguish between ‘happiness’ and ‘joy’. While happiness is a ‘feeling’, joy is a ‘state of mind’. If happiness is peripheral and passing, ‘joy in the Lord’ is deep and lasting.

1. The *joy in the Lord*, is that which emerges from ‘**union with the Father**’, revealed in obedience and love to Him, and related to His redemptive plan. WE know that the main goal of Christian life is to obtain this joy, joy in the Lord, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

“If you keep my commandment, you will *remain in my love*”. Therefore, the joy in the Lord comes from keeping his rule of love and remaining in him. (This is in continuation with the reflection on vine and branches.)

Jesus speaks of this “connectedness’ though love, so that we can obtain and live in joy, that our joy may be ‘complete’. Therefore, the key to find ‘joy’ is remaining in God’s love by keeping his commandments.

2. “I have called you **‘friends’**, You are ‘my friends’, **if you do** what I command you. I no longer call you slaves” Now, the one who loves Jesus and follows his ways by obeying his commands are his friends.

Friendship with God: Elevating His followers from servants to friends, Jesus shares divine truths with them. This shift illustrates the deep, personal relationship God seeks with us, based on transparency and mutual love. *Eg:* The first person to be called ‘the friend of God’ is Abraham, who believed in the word of God. Who did what God ask him.

We have been called *friends of God*, allowed to approach Him whenever we like, with whatever request we care to bring before him. Through love we have been raised to friends, and it must be through love that we approach our God. We are called, commanded and compelled to love each other. What a wonderful task that is. It's not always an easy task but it is wonderful. What would our world be like if everyone truly loved everyone?

This connectedness and relationship take every disciples, every follower to a higher level of intimacy; from ‘slave’ / ‘servant’ to friend. Jesus continues to affirm this type of love which empower any disciple to move to the extend of ‘offering his own life for the friend’, Jesus did this and fulfilled his promise. This is what we celebrate in the Eucharist. “*Do this in memory of me*; memory of what, of a ‘*story of love*, the story of self-sacrifice, self-giving, self-offering of life.

B&S, living in Joy is something real and possible. There can be the possibility to fall away, but anyone who takes these words of Jesus seriously, a joyful life is possible and attainable.

Jesus came to us, told us his plans, showed us how to live, and how to die. He showed us love is the only way. Then he commanded us as his friends to do his work. Not as servants just doing as we are told, but as friends, thinking and acting with love, bringing His kingdom of heaven to earth. It is through our love for each other that His kingdom can come here, what we are called to achieve. Amen.