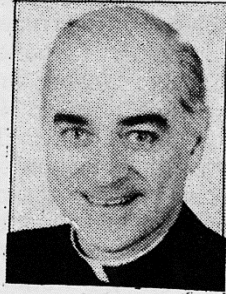


Joy and Pain

Is it possible to experience both joy and pain at the same time? Yes it is. Joy and pain are like the north and south poles on one planet, at the center they become indistinguishable. Joy is possible even in painful circumstances. The saints and mystics testify to this. In Christ all things are possible.



If you are in severe physical pain these words may not be of much help, so I ask your forgiveness in advance. Please bear with me as I try to explore this mystery a bit further.

We all know that pain is absolutely horrible. It can be overpowering and crippling, but we also know it is passing. Pain runs its course, whereas joy is eternal. We may be battered by suffering of one kind or another, but if we keep the faith we will not be defeated.

The mystery of good and evil is often linked to this question. Much suffering is caused by the malice of others. Consider the senseless bloodshed in Rwanda, the merciless murder of civilians in Sarajevo or the slaughter of innocent in the Oklahoma terrorist bombing. These horrors are too difficult to bear. Nevertheless, we carry on, living in God's love like a bee nestled in the calyx of a fragrant flower.

The great challenge is to bear suffering with courage. If you can, try to be charitable in the process you have exhibited a sure sign of holiness. Charity is the essence of Christian perfection. Hospital patients have the same duty to be charitable as the nurses and doctors.

It's all done by trusting God's hidden plan for your life. Accepting all that God allows to happen to you is not easy to do. The art of practicing cheerful acquiescence may sound impossible, but the saints practiced it, and there is always grace.

Blessed Julian of Norwich wrote: "The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything." This lofty knowledge may not spare you from the ravages of disease, but it can focus your mind on eternal truths. When St. Therese of Lisieux began to vomit blood in the last phase of her life in 1896 she welcomed her

tuberculosis as the first summons of death and heaven. "I had a faith so living and lucid," she wrote, "that the thought of heaven was the sum of all my happiness." Pray for that same grace.

Joy can prevail over suffering and sorrow, or at least it can coexist with it. It takes great faith to realize that the Lord rose from the dead to give us hope in the glorious outcome of our own lives. All our pain will be purified in the furnace of His love.

The Lord asks us to be brave as we carry our cross. In times of suffering remember God's unchanging love. Conversely, when you are happy, don't forget those less fortunate than yourself. The joys of heaven await you. In all circumstances, trust God blindly, immediately and completely.

No one expects you to force feelings of any kind. You're only human. This joy we speak of is not a feeling you have to conjure up. It is simply a peaceful acceptance. You can accept your weakness and fragility without becoming discouraged. God will give you the grace to find His own joyful spirit abiding within you. He knows that you're doing the best you can and He loves you for that. Trust Him and let Him be your joy and strength.

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