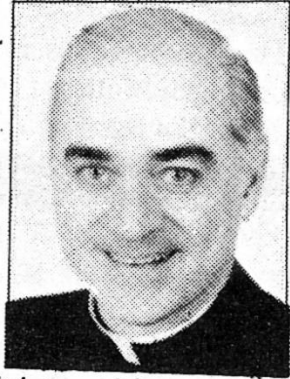


The Gift of Joy

One of my favorite sources of spiritual reading over the years has been "The Catholic Worker," primarily because of the precious wisdom of the late Dorothy Day. Selections from her past articles are still being repeated in each issue. The following piece, one of my favorites, was reprinted from her column "On Pilgrimage," (Jan. 1956):



"...How necessary it is to cultivate a spirit of joy. It is a psychological truth that the physical acts of reverence and devotion make one feel devout. The courteous gesture increases one's respect for others. To act loving is to begin to feel loving, and certainly to act joyful brings joy to others, which in turn makes one feel joyful. Irene Mary Naughton discovered that phrase of Ruskin, 'the duty of delight,' and I have used it many times since."

The duty of delight can mean different things to different people. To some such an idea seems preposterous. They ask, 'how can one have a duty to be joyful?' St. Paul gives the answer, "Rejoice always ... Give thanks to the Lord in all circumstances; for this is the will of God, for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18)

We have a duty to see the silver lining in every cloud; a duty to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. Why? Because of the knowledge of God's love; because of the gift of life; and because of the promise of heaven. We can rejoice always because of all the love and beauty in the world.

Cultivating a positive attitude about life is a matter of training your mind to be joyful in all circumstances, in so far as this is humanly possible. We can delight in God's wonderful creation. We were made to enjoy life with God for all eternity, beginning now.

The notion of "duty" may seem a bit strong to qualify the gentle word "delight" but it is fitting to insist on spiritual discipline in this regard. It is indeed a duty. We can give God no less than the best that is in us.

This is optimism, not new age theology. We find the very same idea expressed in Psalm 37:4; "Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." There is also a line in Psalm 34 that warms my heart: "Look to Him, and be radiant." (Psalm 34:5)

One of my favorite spiritual writers, Blessed Julian of Norwich, offers her own distinctive insight, "The greatest honor you can give to Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of His love." If our joy gives honor to God, then of course it is our duty to be joyful.

To help you in your efforts to delight in the Lord, I wrote this little prayer: "Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of joy, for the happiness which floods my soul when I think of Your love. Help me always to live in such a way as to take delight in Your unchanging love."

To act in a joyful way, will make you feel joyful, and that emotion is contagious. Joy begets joy.

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