

Thoughts at Thanksgiving



“Don't Let The Past Drag You Down” by Father John Catoir

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As a priest for over 55 years, I've heard a lot of confessions. It's one of joys of the priesthood to bring peace to the souls who come to us for relief. The inner pain of guilt can be awful.

The association of psychiatrists tell us that 75% of clients who come to them for help, do so to quiet their guilt feelings. Jesus gave us absolution and a sense of humor to take care of this problem.

"My advice to you is not to inquire why or wither, but just enjoy your ice cream while it's on your plate"

– Thornton Wilder.

This quote captures the essence of it; namely, the art of living in the present moment. I might add: don't take that ideal to the extreme. I once attended a meeting where we had to dispense with the reading of the minutes out of respect for a Hindu priest who was in attendance. His faith required him not to think about the past or the future. A pretty extreme position I admit, especially if one goes so far as to impose it on others, but essentially isn't that idea something we admire? Living in the present moment is an ideal not easily attained. The Hindu was dressed like Gandhi and had white streaks on his face; he taught us a valuable lesson.

The present moment is the only place where we can find peace and joy. The past is merely a memory; the future is unknown and unpredictable. If you live in the past you drag things into the present moment which might disturb your peace. As the proverb goes 'don't let the past drag you down.'

The same is true for the future. The psychiatrists report that 90% of the things that most people worry about will never happen. Isn't it better therefore to eliminate needless worry about the future? Here is the basic truth: happiness is not a destination or a memory, it is the joy we experience here and now.

Granted we enjoy remembering the happy times of the past, but not the dark corners. Regretting past mistakes is only good for stimulating atonement. Confess and be done with it. Memory fades and with it so do the happy moments we once enjoyed. The only place we are really able to be happy is in the present moment. The here and now cannot be wasted with needless worry.

Two things are worth striving for in this connection

1. A clean conscience- guilt can poison your life with unnecessary misery. Strive to put things in order; believe in God's forgiveness, go to confession and renew your good intentions. Pray to persevere in believing that God is love.

2. Reject Fear- this involves a commitment to control fearful thoughts. If you control your thoughts, dreadful feelings will soon evaporate. Every apprehension about the future is the beginning of fear; close it down right away.

As you gradually reduce needless fear and guilt, you will have cleared the present moment from quite a bit of garbage, and worry will disintegrate. The struggle of daily life can be eased by clearing your mind the minute you begin to be afraid. Stop fear and you will automatically enhance your capacity for joy.

Joy is a choice, and it's yours for the asking. Joy is the reward of your faith in God's love. The deeper you believe the more you will feel a security that this world cannot give. Start by eliminating doubt. Atheists teach us to doubt religion in order not to be protected from charlatans. Does that mean they are living in the constant fear of being duped. How sad.

Never doubt God's unchanging love for you-today, tomorrow and always. You are safe in his love. Be vigilant in rejecting doubt, otherwise you'll always be subject to needless fretting. Faith can free you from the nagging discomfort of fear. Be gone with it. Embrace the truth that you are truly loved. Begin to rejoice and be glad for you are wondrously made.