



THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL ...IS A MISSIONARY JOY!

“The Gospel joy that enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy” (EG 21). This brief declaration of Pope Francis is packed with meaning because it highlights the interconnection of four elements—the Gospel, discipleship, community and mission—all of which revolve around joy. Pope Francis is not afraid to say that the joy of the Gospel should touch every aspect of the Christian life: it drinks from the fountain of the Gospel, scales the peak of discipleship, breaks the bread of fraternity and races along the paths of the world. Pope Francis then adds that joy always involves the dynamics of exodus and gift, of leaving self behind, of moving ahead and continuing to sow, of always “going beyond.” Thus when the *wine of joy* is missing, it is urgent that we make a discernment. What is missing? A more profound grasp of the Gospel? A more vibrant and life-enhancing following of Christ? A robust community life that is worthy of being lived? The courage to travel the paths of our times so as to reach the peripheries of the world? When joy is missing, then one of these four elements is not functioning. Joy is not a purely euphoric, abstract and insubstantial feeling. On the contrary, even when confined to the human plane, joy is a response to the human being’s search for meaning. A person is content because something important happened in his/her life; because a certain desire was fulfilled.

But Pope Francis insists that joy is not to be sought for itself alone. If that were the case, then it would dissolve like snow in the

sun. Joy is an end-product. More precisely, it is the fruit of the mystical life of every baptized person. That is to say, it is the fruit of a life hidden in Christ and generated by the Spirit. Joy comes from on high. A Christian intuitively grasps, contemplates and rejoices at how God is acting in his/her life and in history. But a person cannot attain and savor joy apart from others. This is the unvarnished truth. A

Christian needs the Gospel because it is the sole key to the mystery of human existence. Thus true joy belongs only to the world of the Gospel. On the human plane, the term joy indicates a feeling of complete and heartfelt satisfaction. The Gospel perspective, however, is different.

In the New Testament, the word “joy” (*chara*) is in direct dependence on the word “grace” (*charis*). Joy depends on grace and grace comes from God. In fact, the Gospel is called joy: “God’s presence in human beings.” To rejoice means to make one’s own the Good that comes to save us. Joy can be found even in suffering because God dwells in sufferings that are borne with love.

Blessed James Alberione clearly pointed out the two dynamics necessary for joy, saying that, like a train, it runs on two tracks: the first one Marian and the second Pauline. The Marian track is that of a disciple who listens to the Word with the same attitude as Mary, and the Pauline track is that of a community of disciples who take the Word they listened to and share it with as many other people as possible. For Mary, the end-product of listening to the Word was Jesus. For Paul, listening to the Word results in a joyous proclamation of the risen Lord.

A disciple’s joy is humble and gentle, courageous and trail-blazing, because he/she is profoundly aware that everything is grace and that grace is worth more than life itself. A joyous Church is one that is always “going forth” to places no one else reaches. It sees what others do not see. It proclaims what others are unable to express.

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