

# The Happiness of God

## Fr. Paul Check

From today's epistle: "And you, too, must think of yourselves as dead to sin, and live with a life that looks towards God, through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 6:11)

A few words this morning, dear people, about the attributes of God: we know that He is one and three, He is omnipotent and omniscient, He is holy and...He is *happy*. St. Thomas says that we would miss the *reality* of God if we did not think of Him as the perfectly happy Being, i.e. that *God is Happiness*. For us to be happy, to be joyful—in the proper sense—means that we share in happiness that is *not* of ourselves... But for God, to be and to be happy, are the same.

In other words, God's happiness is not contingent; it does not depend on events. It cannot be diminished or intensified by creation or history. Our belief in the efficacy of the Incarnation rests on this idea. God "came unto His own" (Jn 1:11) so that 'His joy might be in us and our joy might be complete.' (cf. Jn 15:11) The Divine Physician entered creation to heal its wounds, precisely because He could and He wanted to do so. *Nemo dat quod non habet*. Perhaps this helps us to understand better the words of Christ: "Your grief will become joy," (Jn 16:20) and "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn 10:10)

For the good of the soul, and for the good of any community for whom Christ is the center, it is necessary, from time to time, to return to this conviction that God is happy, especially as we survey the sadness, the self-inflicted wounds, in the world and in ourselves...lest we become uncertain about who God is and who we are in relationship to Him...lest we forget, as St. Paul reminds us today "that we are slaves of guilt no longer." (Rom 6:6)

To be sure: our joy is not thoughtlessness; it is Christ's joy, Easter joy. This is what St. Paul means when says that through Baptism, we have been fitted to the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:5) The cause of human sadness is sin; the cause of joy is grace, the life of God, which comes to us through Our Lord's saving life, death and resurrection and which He shares personally with individual souls through the Sacraments of Christ's Church, beginning with Baptism. As a result, in St Paul's words, we "live and move in a new kind of existence." (Rom 6:4)

So God is happiness, and through His Son He has shared His joy with His other children. But having said this, we must also grant that we rightly call and think of Our Lord as a "Man of Sorrows." One of the greatest mysteries on this side of the veil is that, at the very same time, Jesus enjoyed the Beatific Vision even as He confronted and realized the horror of sin as only the God-man could.

Indeed, only in one place in the Gospel are we told explicitly about the happiness of Christ. St. Luke writes, "Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit," (10:21)...such a marvelous expression and confirmation of the fullness of His humanity. And why did Jesus rejoice? "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike..."

...to little ones. Here is the reason for the happiness of the Savior: the right people are receiving His message...the simple, the childlike, the humble. This is the way, the key, to happiness...here is the test of the heart according to God's will and standard...and so Jesus, the perfect child of God, rejoices. And, He invites us to receive His joy: 'Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened by the weight of sin and the unhappiness of a fallen world, and I will give you peace and rest.' (cf. Mt 11:28)

Learning to smile through the tears is an essential Christian virtue...and the simple-hearted wonder of the children of God for the beauty and goodness of God's creation and for His grace makes this virtue possible. The liturgy encourages us: *Gloria, Gaudete, Laetare*. Yes, we must be sorrowful for sin, for man's continued rebellion v. his Creator and Redeemer... and *not* because we are melancholy. Our sorrow, Christian sorrow, only makes sense because of the goodness and joy of God.

We can see that much of the world remains at enmity with God. Original Sin has been described as an attempt to throw off the fatherhood of God...how many continue to exchange their birthright for a "mess of pottage" as Esau did in the book of Genesis. (25:29-34) Such deserves not our disdain or condescension, but our pity...and a true Christ-like sadness. But such also calls for us to show our Christ-like joy to the world, all the more. "Joy is the net that catches souls," said Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. Evangelization without joy will likely be sterile; it is certainly lacking in the fullness of the

charity of the Sacred Heart. “Saints are not sad,” said Frank Sheed. Our Lord told us that the tree is known by its fruit. If you and I are not drawing souls to Christ, while our orthodoxy might be in place, our smile might not. I would not normally give this advice, but perhaps we should occasionally look in the mirror. A good priest friend of mine likes to say, “If you are happy, please notify your face.” Even before He spoke, Jesus drew souls to Himself with His glance...

The dour and the grim will not further the Kingdom of Heaven on earth...only the children of God, reborn in Baptism and steeped in grace, will, after the example of God’s Son, share the good, the true and the beautiful, by first sharing their joy. Simple hearts, humble hearts, trusting and peaceful hearts...that is to say, Christ-like hearts...that are “dead to sin, and alive with a life that looks toward God, through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 6:11)

In all things, dear people, we look to Our Lady...now, that we may rejoice as she—the happiest of all God’s creatures—did. ‘For He has looked with favor on His lowly and humble-hearted children; the Almighty has done great things for His beloved sons and daughters. Holy and *happy* is His Name.’ (cf. Lk 1:48,49)

The Father has shared His Son, His happiness, His life, with us.

Deo gratias.