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John 15:11

Monthly Reflection:

December 2023

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)

The Bible begins with the book of Genesis, and the creation accounts transport us to a primordial garden where everything exists in perfect harmony. In paradise, all things, all creatures, are subject to one another so that, through the well-orderedness of the created world, the joy and love with which God created the world flows through all things and can be experienced in all things at all times. In the weariness of life, in the face of its challenges and questions, is this not the joy that all people now thirst for? Sometimes we leap up towards this elevated joy with a naive enthusiasm, only to find ourselves back on the ground again. We try to hang on to big waves of excitement and passion that surge through life, but they inevitably crash and dissipate into our own brokenness. And so we realise that we are not in paradise. In this life, we are also faced with toil, suffering, and evil, as the brutality of present wars only too painfully reminds us.

Yet, this sober awakening is not without hope. True and lasting joy may not be cheap, but it is absolutely real. The quest for meaningful and lasting joy takes us straight to the one who alone speaks to our hearts. He says to us, These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. His words are spirit and life. And whoever hears, understands, contemplates, and interiorizes his words, becomes like a tree planted beside a running stream. In time, they find themselves bearing the abundant and inexplicable fruit of joy.

Joy is simple and sweet, but it comes about through the progressive expansion and healing of the human heart by Christ. Such ongoing formation of the heart is the desire and commitment of every disciple of his. The disciple does not just “go through” formation but yearns for it. No longer willing to be tossed about by the waves of life, they go even to great lengths to seek out guidance and to find meaningful and mutually edifying Christian fellowship. This mark of discipleship goes back all the way



through the Church's history to the very first disciples who, in addition to the Eucharist, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship" (Acts 2:42). In this way, their joy multiplied even amidst adversity and persecution.

To desire formation is to desire more of his joy – joy that is full – so that one can truthfully say, I am more joyful now than I have ever been before! It is not that we magically escape our own fallenness and that of the world; rather, his joy consumes our sorrows and shines through our poverty. His joy is honest because it does not naively shield itself from painful realities. His joy is constant; it doesn't go up and down in violent extremes but steadily grows within us. His joy is humble and simple, as we recognize its sheer gift, and it shines through us unaffectedly. Finally, his joy is supreme, being greater and more real than every pain and suffering that life may bring.

Why would the Father have given us all in Christ Jesus if he did not wish to see us joyful in the new paradise of the Kingdom? As we renew our "yes" to the formation, we choose to always abide in his love and to keep his word faithfully. And he, for his part, promises us that his joy will remain in us. He assures us that our joy will be full!

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