

# The Christian Sacrament of Joy

John 15: 11

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## THE CHRISTIAN SACRAMENT OF JOY

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." John 15:11 RSV  
"I have told you this so that you can share My joy, and that your happiness may be complete." (Phillips)

Of this we are very sure, the early Christians were joyful people. This joy had begun with their first meeting with Jesus. One of the criticisms directed at Jesus was that he did not take things seriously enough. He spent much time at feasts and weddings. He did not fast as did the disciples of John. The first century Christian fellowship was able to capture some of his joy. From time to time in the centuries that follow this joy has broken out and the sheer exuberance of the gospel has broken the old canons in which we have tried to confine it. Harrison Franklin Hall says that "Joy belongs to the Christian life" and it can become a means of grace. In the Gospel according to John Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." A modern translator puts it: "I have told you this so that you can share My joy, and that your happiness may be complete."

We should remember that these words come out of the discourses to the disciples preceding the Crucifixion. This sacrament of joy is not a shallow empty thing. Actually it is rooted in pain and suffering. Perhaps this is one reason why we are so unable to achieve it. Today we want to avoid the pain of life. We seem to be quite unable to hear God's voice through suffering. Possibly because of the tragedy of our twentieth century we find it difficult to discover meaning in suffering. Real joy requires that we look far beyond ourselves. It requires that we accept our lives and the grace of God as it relates to the experiences of our lives. Christian joy is not a superficial experience relating to peace and prosperity. It is rather a deep experience that can grow out of suffering. I want to stress today that God expects that our happiness may be complete and that Christ's joy may be in us.

## II. First, let us look at some of the things that prevent us from having this experience of Christian joy

A. I think the first block is that we lack the imagination to rise above the routine of our lives.

1. There is a bit of verse which I once found carved on a plaque at the rim of the Grand Canyon which I have quoted to some of you and will quote again  
"IF YOU KEEP YOUR NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE ROUGH  
AND KEEP IT DOWN THERE LONG ENOUGH  
IN TIME YOU FORGET THAT THERE ARE SUCH THINGS  
AS TREES THAT BARKLE AND HERDS THAT SING  
AND THESE WILL ALL YOUR WORLD COMPOSE  
YOURSELF, THE GRINDSTONE, AND YOUR POOR OLD NOSE!"

2. Do not misunderstand. I know that all of us must be concerned with the routine, humdrum things of everyday life. But it must be the function of our religion to help us develop imagination enough to overcome the routine

3. "House Wary"  
"I'm going out! I'm tired of tables, chairs;  
I'm tired of walls that hug me all about;  
I'm tired of rooms and ceilings, carpets, stairs,  
And so—I'm going out!"

Somewhat or other what I need today  
Are dimes, and birds that caw, winds that shout!  
I want Dame Nature's friendship.  
Thus I say,  
Good-by — I'm going out!

It's just house-tiredness.

Trivial humdrum strain!  
Montomy! 'Tis when I've climbed the hill,  
My heart, refreshed, will laugh and sing again  
Dear home! I'll love it still!" — Ian Craig

4. Lord Dunsany once said that to hate poetry is  
"To see men and women without their halos and the world  
without its glory. It is to beat one's hands all day  
against the gates of fairyland and to find that they are  
shut and the country empty and its kings gone hence."

5. Now this is not just escape from the realities of life that I am talking about. I am saying that you and I must discover what the true realities are

a. We talk a lot about it  
b. Fringe — manager and head official talking while I wait to buy something. I finally leave but they are still talking about the most efficient way of getting the merchandise sold.  
c. May I suggest that you stop talking about religion and start living your faith!  
d. Develop the imagination you need to break the bond of a killing routine.

e. This is one function of worship  
B. I think the second block between us and Christian joy can be a swelling of egotism

1. May a man or woman drives himself unmercifully in a vain attempt to rid himself of such a burden  
2. Some people develop feelings of resentment toward others simply because they are really resentful of themselves.

3. Carl Winkelman says it so well when he writes:  
"FEWING HIS GHOST IS, NO MAN NEED BEAR HIS  
GUILT HIMSELF. EITHER IN SELF-ACCUSATION OR  
ACCUSATIONS TOWARD OTHERS. . . ."  
CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO ACCEPTS GOD'S ACCEPTANCE  
OF THE DEED WHICH HE HAS MISDEED."

4. There is a real place for confession in the Christian life and we shall never know the real joys of faith until we have experienced the liberation that comes from the realization that God has forgiven us.

5. Perhaps this is why Paul places joy as one of the fruits of the spirit. In our scripture today we read, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

6. The third block between us and true Christian joy is frustration, the frustration which comes from putting ourselves at the center of our world.

1. If the most important thing for you is to have your own way I am afraid you will never know the blessing of Christian joy  
2. Christ did say: He who seeks to save his life will lose it. This is very profound

3. To achieve this does not happen in a moment but takes a lot of living  
4. It starts with a commitment which we make and which goes far deeper than just doing a church or even working in a church.

The Rich Young Man

"It seemed so sad a way to do  
To grieve so deep — to perish, too  
For man He never even knew!  
A life so lonely, meek, and bare!  
I wonder why He made a prayer  
For them that mocked and nailed Him there!  
Vast wealth is mine; why do I see  
My golden hoard without avail?  
Why turns no man with love to me?  
Why did He triumph, and I fail?  
Poor and despised! how strange a thing  
That mighty hosts, with worshipping,  
Their homage to His name should bring!  
Oh, 'tis a grievous mystery—  
That mankind never looks to me  
As to that spent and broken Christ  
That dropped on Calvary!" — Laura Simmons.

## III. Conclusion

A. You have noticed that in speaking about the things which keep us from the experience of joy I have also suggested how these difficulties can be removed.

B. In every case we cannot remove them ourselves, this can be done only by God

C. At the same time God himself cannot remove them until we permit Him to do so. This is the strange paradox of Christianity. But this is the heart of our faith.

D. We come to church not to listen to an essay on good works. We come to church to commit our lives to the power which can bring us the sacrament of joy. This joy is yours, if you will but let God give it to you.

