

Take Joy ~ December 13, 2009
Psalm 30:4-5, 11-13; Philipians 4:4-9; Isaiah 12:3-6

Fra Giovanni wrote:

I salute you! There is nothing I can give you which you have not;

But there is much that, while I cannot give, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.

Take Heaven.

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant.

Take Peace.

The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it, yet within our reach is joy.

Take Joy.

And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you, with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Auntie Mame posed these same sentiments in another way. She said: “Life is a banquet and most poor souls are starving to death.” I cleaned up Auntie Mame’s language a bit—she is a rather salty girl.

Joy dwells deep within those who possess it. It is not the same thing as happiness. Instead, it is an everlasting sense that all will be well no matter what it is we may be facing now. Happiness seems to come and go with the winds of change around us. But no matter how we may be buffeted by those winds, and although weeping may linger for the night, we will find joy does come with the morning. Joy, along with hope and love, never is defeated in a heart that has faith.

Whether we have joy or not depends on the way we look at life and the stresses it brings us. If we choose to look at the glass as being half, or more, full, it is. If we choose to look at it as half empty, it is.

We do not always realize it, but the way we think is the way we are. People with a positive outlook on life take others by their hearts and souls and lift them up with them. People who only dwell in the gloom and doom of life, try to drag others down to where they are. They illustrate the old adage that tells us “Misery loves company.” They love nothing better than to have others join them in the chorus of “Nothing is going right, we are doomed. Let’s go back to the old ways and old days.” Often we find ourselves spending too much time with those who love to revel in worst-case scenarios. When we choose to do this we find ourselves fighting to regain a sense of balance and we wonder where it is we have lost our faith and hope and energy. It is

exhausting to be in the company of those who are negative. When we dwell in their world we defeat ourselves and begin to slide backward.

Evidently we are not new to this. In Paul's Letter to the Philippians we are told to "Rejoice in the Lord, always..." and to let our gentleness be known to everyone. We are not to worry about anything, but to take time to put our concerns and troubles into the hands of God and pause to see how things unfold.

As many of you know, I am a great believer in letting go of incessant worry and the need to have things go according to my small plans. There is a far bigger picture unfolding all around us and we need to pause a bit and see what it may bring. All our pushing and pulling, nudging and whining only leads us to turmoil within and without.

How do we manage to step back a bit and let things unfold? Paul gave us a clue-- by thinking on things that are 'honorable, pleasing, pure, commendable, true, worthy of praise.' He told that tiny church to look for all the things that were right in their world and not to dwell on what they perceived as wrong. He encouraged it to a kinder, gentler way of doing things, to see areas of gray and not just to see in black and white.

Paul had a special place in his heart for the followers that had formed this little church in Philippi and this letter is full of his affection and concern for them. Those early followers needed all the positive reinforcement they could find to help them move forward in securing their new way of life—a way that had been brought to them and taught to them through the person of Jesus. Had there been too many who kept looking at the things that possibly could go wrong, we might not be sitting here today.

Instead of looking for everything in life that could go wrong or that drags us down, we need to look for those things that bring us the very best. Paul tells us that by doing this, the God of peace will be with us. Who among us does not desire peace for our mind and soul?

On the huge banquet table of life, we are allowed to pick and choose those things that are beautiful and fair and we are allowed to think on them to the exclusion of things that are not so lovely.

This doesn't mean that we bumble through life thoughtlessly but that we move forward with a positive perspective on things knowing that our task is to be people who seek to raise everyone up and not bring them down. We need to understand that our job is to consider the pathway that lies before us and choose to take the one that leads us forward in trust in a God, who has never failed us in the past and who never will fail us in the present.

Jesus brought this message to his immediate followers and to us. To continue to move his message of hope, forgiveness, joy and love forward he could not stop too long to worry a problem to death. Instead of doing so, he "took Joy" in the simple living of life, in serving others with a gentle and willing heart and manner and in always serving his God. He urged those who would follow him to do the same.

So, in this often stressful and very busy season of life, when there are a million details and concerns that tug on us, remember to "take Joy" from the wonderful banquet of life set before us. Think of that baby in the manger and let him, like babies everywhere, light up your life with joy.

-- Amen