

## **Take Joy ~ December 12, 2010**

**II Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11; Luke 1:46b-55**

Very often, when we light the third candle of the Advent wreath, the Candle of Joy, which is the pink one, I share this reading from Fra Giovanni with you:

*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.*

This past Thursday I watched Oprah. I usually do not watch this program because I do not have the time and the topics on it are not very engaging. This past Thursday, however, I made it a point to watch because she was interviewing Dr. Petit and I was wondering how he was doing and what he would say when he was not standing on courthouse steps answering questions. I have noticed that no matter what venue he might be in, his responses are always controlled, intelligent and right on target. I am certain many of us have been impressed by his composure.

Among many other questions during the interview, he was asked if he thought he would ever have happiness again. He responded that, others told him that there would come a time when he would. I know that all of us hope he will find happiness, again, and that not one of us would wish the terrible ordeal he has been through on anyone, not even our worst enemy.

My hope is that, some day, when he awakens, he finds a touch of joy in the sunlight that greets him, or in a bird's song. I hope that "the day breaks and the shadows flee away." This may take a long time and a lot of healing. But, Dr. Petit is past the point of considering taking his own life so he is moving forward.

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 in the present moment. 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, peace 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.”

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.

The prophet Isaiah told the nation Israel, a nation full of doom and gloom, of the joy it would have when their world would be set back in order. The shadows would fall away and the chosen people would rejoice in the light that was to come. They were to believe that God would restore that nation once again and that it would live in peace and plenty.

John the Baptist, that voice crying in the wilderness in a jail cell, wondered if Jesus was the one who was coming—the one whose way John was preparing. Jesus told him, that he was. John must have felt a deep sense of joy to know that all his efforts had not been in vain and that the mission he had started would be completed.

The author of the Letter of James asked for patience from his readers as they awaited the return of Christ and the joy it would bring. He told them to set aside their concerns and their grumbling about one another. There was a far bigger picture unfolding around them and they needed to pause and consider what it might bring. All their pushing and pulling, nudging and whining only would lead them to turmoil within and without.

We need to understand, as did Israel and as did the readers of that little letter, that things will, eventually, come round right. That our job is to consider the pathways that lie 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 or future.

Jesus brought this message to his immediate followers and to us. To continue to move his message of hope, peace, 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*