

HE HAS NOTHING BUT HE'S NEVER BEEN HAPPIER



"Be As I walked out of church, I ran into a newly-made acquaintance who I delight in talking with. We don't know each other that well but when we talk, I am buoyed. He wears an air of joy and leadership that I cannot help but enjoy. Last week I asked him if he led a ministry, because he seemed as if he were a leader, not by title or by fiat, but by his demeanor.

Indeed, he said, he coordinates the ushers; he leads the Usher Ministry. Then he went on to tell me how he has never been happier than he is now because of the service he gives back.

He explained that he has nothing but he's never been happier. He said these words, "never been happier," four, five, or six times as if to make sure that I understood his message and learned what was important.

He lived in Mexico before moving to Portland. He described how he had everything: his family, his own business, money, a house, two Hummers ("You know what a Hummer is?" he asked). In Mexico he had two Hummers!

I asked him why he lives in Oregon now. He said that his wife is an American, and an Oregonian. After years of living in Mexico, she missed her family. So he and their family lived in Oregon for a month and then back in Mexico and then in Oregon for a few months until he realized that this was home. So the family moved here.

For reasons he did not explain and I did not ask, he said he lost everything: his home, his money, his Hummers. But he's never been happier because now he's serving. "That's all that I need." I don't have much. We live in a small apartment. But I have my family; I have my parish, and I serve. And I've never been happier.

I don't know what brings people happiness. I am at a place where I think that the authors of the Declaration of Independence had it wrong, that happiness is not an inalienable right. There certainly is an eternal life in the Kingdom of God that will be a delight, but there's no guarantee that the years leading up to it – life – will be happy. Often they are not.

Joy, on the other hand, is an inalienable right. Joy is not happiness. Joy is more synonymous with contentment but even that's not an exact exchange of emotions.

Joy is an emotion that's not achieved upon acquiring material goods or reaching an accomplishment. Joy is an inner sense of being that crescendos when it is an inner sense of being in relationship with Christ.

I don't pray for happiness for others; I pray that they have joy.

My friend is happy though he is poor. Perhaps unintentionally he followed the instruction of St. Paul, who encouraged the Corinthians to excel in the gracious act "that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply [other's] needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. As it is written:

*Whoever had much did not have more,
and whoever had little did not have less" 2 COR 8: 13-15.*

Although he is without material abundance, my friend is rich through his service to others. He is with Christ. He has joy.

(Sunday Readings for June 28, 2015)



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