

Joy

This fourth week of Lent is called Laetare Sunday, the Latin word for joy. We take a pause in the more solemn preparation of Lent to experience a glimpse of the joy of the new life awaiting us in the resurrection Jesus won for us. If we are not particularly joyful during this time, especially in light of all that is going on in the world, I think we need only look to Saint Francis's famous story about perfect joy.

The story is told of St Francis dictating to brother Leo what perfect joy is not: Having thousands join the order or performing many miracles or even converting thousands in their preaching but rather if on a very cold night, Francis and his brothers were to knock on the door and the porter came out in anger to drive them away with oaths and blows, as if they were vile impostors, saying, "Begone, miserable robbers!" And if they accepted all this with patience, with joy, and with charity, then, he told Br Leo, write that this indeed would be perfect joy.

Why? He explained: Above all the graces and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ grants to his friends, is the grace of overcoming oneself, and accepting willingly, out of love for Christ, all suffering, injury, discomfort and contempt; for in all other gifts of God we cannot glory, seeing they proceed not from ourselves but from God, according to the words of the Apostle, "What hast thou that thou hast not received from God? and if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" But in the cross of tribulation and affliction we may glory, because, as the Apostle says again, "I will not glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen."

We are called therefore to have peace in our hearts and a perfect joy in our soul during this time of difficulty. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote that joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God. Why? because it speaks of our faith and love for God, which transcends circumstance and difficulties. Our vulnerability to the sufferings of this world make visible our trust in God. Just as the movie *Collateral Beauty* sought to point to the giftedness, that is, the hidden blessings in the tragedies of life all around us, we are invited not to miss what Jesus calls in the Gospel—the works of God which are made visible through the suffering and so see the silver lining, that is, our joy, which can preach about the goodness and steadfast love of God.