

Gifts of the Visitation Project by ACCW, 2021
Based on the book, Gifts of the Visitation by Denise Bossert

Session #3: Gift of Joy

Opening Quote:

“A committed missionary knows the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others. Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy, since ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 272.

Scripture:

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”
Lk 1:39-45

Written Reflection:

Mother Teresa, though living and working in the midst of poverty, understood the power of joy: “Joy is prayer. Joy is strength. Joy is love. Joy is the net of love by which you can catch souls.” Reflect with Bossert (pp. 46-47): “Is my life marked by the spirit of joy? How can I share my joy in deliberate ways with others? Do I try to make one act of shared joy a part of what I do every day? ... Where in my daily prayer life can I add that simple invitation: ‘Come, Holy Spirit, fill me with a spirit of joy?’”

“It all harkens back to that first moment, when two women embraced. Their unborn babies communed. And the Spirit of the Lord danced among them. The gift of joy that God had given to them was shared, and the sharing of the gift made the gift grow.”
Gifts of the Visitation, Bossert, p. 46.

Video Witness:

Gift of Joy by Emily Klaus of St. Thomas Aquinas, Ames and Anastasia Nicklaus of St. Edward, Waterloo.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

From the very first moment of watching Emily and Ann (Anastasia), it's evident that joy radiates through their friendship! Emily “just HAD to ask Ann” because there’s “so much joy in their friendship!” They met when Emily was a student and Anastasia was a campus minister. Though at different ages and experiencing different stages of life, their friendship has remained strong, far past Emily’s college years. Discuss: Do you have a strong, Christ-centered, friendship with someone at a different stage of life or who lives in a different place? Someone who is “the woman I can go to”?

Emily begins by recounting her engagement to be married and rushing to tell Anastasia her good news! Emily remarks, “She was excited and joyful for us *and* with us!” Reflect: With whom can

you share good news? Why? But we must be careful: Bossert writes, “The surest way to lose our joy is to succumb to jealousy” (p. 42). Envy and jealousy can kill a friendship. Reflect: Are you truly happy when your friend has good news? Discuss: How have you seen envy destroy a friendship?

Mary and Elizabeth were joy-filled, even though they also experienced great hardship and sorrow. As Ann reflects, “Joy is not saccharine.” Rather, “Joy is knowing God’s abiding presence.” Discuss: When have you experienced joy in the midst of suffering or hardship? How has a friendship helped you through sorrow?

Authentic joy, rather than emotional moments, is always attractive. Ann reflects on the effect of their friendship: “When we’re together, people are attracted to the joy that comes from our being together.” She later reminds us, “Joy is contagious. You bring out the joy in me.” Emily and Anastasia’s friendship brings out the joy in all who know them. Joy is such a powerful witness that “catches souls” (Mother Teresa). Discuss: Do you know people (friendships) who bring out your joy? How does joy “catch” souls?

Emily talked about asking Ann to be her daughter’s Godmother: “I wanted her to always be a part of our lives.” Ann, now Godmother to Eliza, always thinks of the Visitation as Eliza’s Feast Day—and she celebrates it! Discuss: Are there women who you always want in your life? How will you sustain these friendships through “visitations”?

Emily concluded by imagining the many conversations between Mary and Elizabeth—in the daily things like making bread and just chatting together! And Ann added, “Joy is in the everyday things. ... When you are kindred spirits, it doesn't have to be the big-deal stuff. Joy comes from celebrating the everyday.” Discuss: Can you imagine the conversations between Mary and Elizabeth? What do you think they spoke of? How do you experience joy in the everyday?

Challenge:

Joy is the abiding presence of Jesus in our lives. If you are not experiencing joy, pray for this gift. Then share your joy of Christ with another through a phone call, a written note, an invitation.

Closing Prayer:

“Lord, give me a spirit of joy. Lead me into a deeper walk with you. Reveal more of the Father’s love for me. And let me have a share in the joy of following you. Show me the path I must walk—the path that yields joy. I am ready for whatever you have planned for me. Let your mother journey with me, holding my hand when I need it, wrapping her mantle around me when joy seems elusive. Let her joy be my joy as we share you with the world. For your glory.”
Gifts of the Visitation, Bossert, p. 47.

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.