

Readings: [Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

In a scale of 1-10, how joyful are you feeling today?

Last week we saw how faith in Jesus as *the Christ* should change us from being in this constant search for happiness, to being people of *joy* for we have found in Jesus the *source of happiness*.

Well, I don't know about you, but I feel like I've accepted Jesus in my life *pretty* evidently... yet *I am not always joyful*... sometimes for whatever reason I might feel angry, upset, indifferent, annoyed... I'm not always very Christ-like. So, the question that arises is: *why, if Christians hold the source of joy, why are we so miserable sometimes?*

I don't know how accurate this story is, but it is said that Gandhi was very interested in Christianity, he found the Jesus of the gospels very attractive, appealing, especially with how Jesus was so outspoken against discrimination and injustice, things that for Gandhi were important. One day he decided to go to a Christian church in Calcutta expecting see Christians embody this loving spirit of Jesus. To his unpleasant surprise, he was stopped from entering the Church by a moody usher because they only allowed Indians of a higher cast, or whites, to enter. This attitude didn't seem to correlate with the Jesus he found in the gospels, and later in his life in an interview someone asked him "have you ever considered becoming a Christian?" to which he answered "*I thought about becoming a Christian, until I met one. I like your Christ; I don't like your Christians.*"

Why, if Christians hold the source of joy, do we seem to be so miserable at times?

It's not a trick question, nor is it a mystery, James offers us part of the answer. He asks *where do conflicts among you come from?* To which he responds immediately: *You covet but do not possess... You envy but you cannot obtain... so you get into fights, wage war, even kill.* What is he referring to? **Frustration**... that the source of conflict that James identifies is **frustration**.

Think about it, in your own life, when do you tend to argue the most? What leads to most fights? When we get frustrated!

Frustrated that something didn't go the way we wanted. Frustrated that someone is not listening to us or did not do what we wanted them to. Frustrated that all the work we did was not appreciated. Frustrated that we are being asked to do something we don't want. Frustrated that we can't get something we want. Frustrated that someone else is doing better than you. Frustrated that in 2015 Russell Wilson decided to throw the ball in the last 20 seconds of the game instead of just running for the touchdown which resulted in an interception and loss of the game! (I'm still frustrated about that one!!!).

James defines frustration as an **uncontrolled passion** fed by **jealousy and ambition**. **Jealousy** because we are constantly comparing ourselves to others and get frustrated when we don't have what others have, an **ambition** because we never quite feel like we have enough, and that is also frustrating.

Now, one could argue that there is nothing wrong with being a little jealous and ambitious...

After all, feeling a little jealous does let you recognize that there is something of value to have and protect. Being a little ambitious does give you a drive to get things done. But in the catholic understanding of sin and the human person, jealousy and ambition are always to be rejected because they often overpower a person.

Have you ever felt jealous over someone? Especially at the start of a relationship, at first it can be cute... *“oh this person must really like me, they don’t want to lose me”* but that jealousy can consume the person with this irrational need and frustration to control the other, sometimes resulting in emotionally and physically abusive relationships. Same with ambition, at first it can seem like an honorable trait that we very subtly begin to teach our kids: *“that was ok... but you can do better next time...”* and before you know it a person grows up consumed by an irrational need and frustration to always come on top, no matter what.

If we go even deeper in the Catholic understanding of sin, what lies beneath frustration, what lies further beneath jealousy and ambition, ***at the root of the problem is pride and envy***... two of the seven capital sins, capital meaning “primary,” tendencies that are deeply rooted in the human psyche which Jesus came to unveil and save us from, and that is clear in today’s gospel where Jesus is teaching us what it means to be a successful Christian.

Last week Peter came to the *realization that Jesus was the Christ*, and at last a great indestructible Kingdom was at hand. But notice how Jesus keeps repeating the same thing over and over “*the son of man will suffer, will die...*” Despite Jesus trying to explain to them the Kingdom was not what they thought, they kept ignoring him because the passion of *jealousy and ambition had overcome their thoughts*, it had consumed them to the point where all they could think of is who would get the best positions.

I imagine that in that walk to the house, they were starting to get frustrated with one another and Jesus. “*Why would Jesus reveal his identity to Peter and not me? What does he have that I don’t? He’s just a fisherman... I’m the accountant, I’ve got the business skills... I have what it takes to help Jesus run this Kingdom... I am more fit... why doesn’t Jesus seem to notice me? What do I have to do to be the greatest?*”

Jesus could sense the danger in this attitude. So many dynasties, empires, political systems, and kingdoms have come and gone in the history of humanity, kingdoms that rise out of the ambition to be the greatest, only to fall because someone will eventually come who is more powerful... humanity is constantly frustrated to be on top, constantly at war with each other...

Jesus knew that if the kingdom he was establishing was to be truly successful and have no end, as we recite in our creed, then something in them had to change... their perception, their worldview, their idea of success had to be flipped upside down, or rather, right side up...

To start with, the very fact that Jesus chose these 12 says something about what he is doing... they were misfits, not what you would necessarily consider “kingdom building material.” Any CEO today would laugh at those selections... yet *Jesus could see in them something different, something good*, which is why he did not get frustrated with them, but patiently, time and time again, sat them down and continued explaining what he was asking of them. In this case, by using a child.

In a society where success was measured in a person’s own achievements, children and servants were considered worthless because they contributed nothing to society, they had no rights or social status, and they were fully dependent on men to protect and provide for them. This vulnerable status became the perfect example for the new virtues that Jesus was bringing which is why in more than one occasion Jesus uses children and servants as metaphors in his teachings.

In this case, the child becomes an example of the attitude they are to adopt: *full dependency on God*. This is actually a very funny scene, Jesus is in a way snapping them to reality by saying “don’t think of yourself as highly prominent... I chose you just like this child... none of you have prominent places in society... tax collector, fisherman... I am choosing you, not because I am interested in your capabilities, you have none... I am choosing you because your vulnerable status, *as sinners*, makes you capable of realizing that you need to depend on God, not yourself... and that is what will save you from yourself...”

From a scale of 1-10, how good of a sinner are you?

I know I am a solid 10... on a good day I might go down to a 7, maybe even 6 if I'm feeling extra holy...

In a scale of 1-10, how good of a Christian are you today? If Gandhi came to visit, would he be impressed or disappointed?

If the success of Christianity was measured in the quality of the character of believers, then Gandhi was right... we are not very good Christians...

However, I would argue that he missed the point... as good a humanitarian as he was, he was measuring success in the same way we measure all worldly success: based on our own personal achievement.

But Jesus sees in us something different. The success and beauty of the Christian body of believers is not measured in how joy-filled and perfect her members are, *all the time*, God know we are a mixed bag... some days we are more Christ-like than others...

No... the success and beauty of being a Christian comes in our recognition that we are sinners, and we need to come to church precisely because we cannot be good Christians on our own, and must be fully dependent on God's grace.

As Pope Francis often remind us: we are here partaking in the eucharist not because it is our reward for good behavior, but because we are a people in need of God's grace. That is why he often says that no Catholic, not even a politician whose policies are against Church teaching, can be denied communion, because if there is to be conversion of heart, then they need the grace, it begins there.

In that case, that makes all us here perfect candidates... we are all good sinners, and even in our worst of moments, the fact that we can come to Jesus, in a scale of 1-10, that should make us pretty joyful.

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