

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

I want to make you happy today, I have a little gift for you: a short homily. Just kidding, not today, but that did get some of you smiling, happy... like when in school you knew you were getting out 10 minutes early, it makes your day!

It's incredible what sorts of things bring us little moments of happiness, and we like being happy, hence why we spend a good part our day breaking away from the grind of everyday life to do something we enjoy, eat a certain food, see a particular person, I myself make time to interact and observe my animal collection which makes me feel happy.

Universally I think it is safe to say we all desire happiness, it is a necessity in our lives, but this also comes at a cost, because the way our *brain is wired often makes it difficult to distinguishing between things that bring us a sense of happiness, and that in which happiness actually lies.*

What do I mean? That desire for happiness is so prevalent that our primary focus becomes seeking *moments* of happiness, but the downside is that moments only last so long, so we are constantly searching for them which in the long run has the opposite effect... make us miserable, never feeling truly happy.

Most of us have experienced that in our lives: if only I have this then my life will be better. If only I have this job or this position... if only I marry this person... in my case; if only I become a priest, then

finally I will be happy! We romanticize *that moment* and then we do everything it takes to make that happen. Finally we get there, we feel like the happiest person in the world, that honeymoon stage, but when the moment is gone and we face what comes after, the messiness of everyday life; cleaning the house, changing dippers, staying up all night, resolving issues with the in in-laws, stress, taking on a second job, dealing with angry parishioners (not here though, not here!), we end up realizing it wasn't all it was cracked up to be... the good feeling is gone, and the cycle starts all over again... we look for the next thing.

In psychology¹ they call this *hedonic adaptation*, which just means that we are good at getting used to change in our lives, both positive and negative. Current example is facemasks, it was hard to breath with them at first, felt suffocating, uncomfortable, it hurt the ears from the straps, and now we don't even really think about them. When it comes to positive change, we experience a rush of the feel-good hormone, but then it fades away. *Happiness comes and fades, comes and fades.*

Anthropologists suggest this is a two-edge sword. This adaptation is good on the societal level because it pushes us to reach for newness and leads to progress, but, but at the emotional level, it is not so good because we never quite feel *happy enough*.

So now, let's take this little observation in human behavior and look at the gospel today.

¹ The psychological insights used as a reference and framework for this homily is the insights offered in the Hidden Brain podcast: [Hidden Brain Podcast](#) | [Hidden Brain Media](#)

Last week we saw how rumors about the identity of Jesus began to spread. In the non-Jewish world, he was a magician. In the Jewish world, he was either John the Baptist or one of the other prophets. Then in a moment of what can only be divine inspiration, Peter has an aha-moment, sees right through all the rumors, and exclaims “you are the Christ!” Again, Jesus tells them not to tell anyone.

Let’s do a little psychoanalysis on Peter’s behavior when he realized who Jesus truly was... If Jesus was the Christ, the Son of Man, then immediately he thought of the vision described in Daniel 7:13,

“I saw coming with the clouds of heaven one like a son of Man... he received dominion, splendor, and kingship... all nations will serve him, his dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass and shall not be destroyed!”

Imagine the excitement in Peter’s mind, the euphoria of the happy hormone beginning to build up thinking that the moment had arrived. And, since he was quickly becoming Jesus’ right-hand man, imagine what that would mean for him!

Soon gone would be the days of getting up early, fishing from sunrise to sunset just to earn a few coins. At last, just like us when we think “if only I won the lottery, I would be happier,” he thought happiness for him was in the making. He was excited, not so much for who Jesus was, but for what that would mean for him.

Jesus could probably sense the sparkle in Peter’s eye beginning to develop... the sin of greed and self-interest was so strong that Peter could see nothing else but the euphoria of that moment... and the risk

for Peter was that once that moment came and past, he would abandon Jesus for the next thing...

This is where Jesus, wanting him to break away from this idea of chasing happiness... bursts his bubble by saying *“hey... don’t get stuck in the glory of the moment in Daniel 7, remember what is written in Isaiah about the Messiah, about who I am... he will be beaten, buffeted, spat at... the Son of Man will suffer greatly, be rejected and killed!”*

This sounded horrible for Peter’s plan... it was an **obstacle** for his pursuit of happiness, and he was so taken back, he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him, tells him not to say those things...

What does Jesus do? *“Get behind me **Satan**... you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do...”* Ouch...

What does the name Satan mean? An **obstacle**... this is genius, Jesus turns it around... and reveals to him and us that in our “search for happiness” lies a major misconception, a lie (another definition for Satan is liar)... that happiness is found in a moment of power and glory and not only that, but that God is an obstacle to our happiness.

Well isn’t that the truth! How many people view God, talking specifically about Christianity, and even more specific to Catholicism, as an obstacle for happiness? How many people avoid practicing their faith more seriously because they feel like doing so means giving up things that give them moments of happiness? It is understandable, because Christianity if we think about it in the strictest of sense does not sound very appealing!

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.”

Sounds so unappealing... so contrary to how we are wired, Christianity does not measure up to being happy at all! No wonder God becomes an obstacle for many!

We are used to hearing things like “follow *your* dreams... do what makes *you* happy” Even our nation is founded in the idea we have the *right to the pursuit of happiness*... yet though we live in a nation where we can afford more things, have more things, achieve more things... people are not any happier...

Jesus’s offer, though it sounds like misery, is actually a way to help us break away from this cyclical obsession and pursuit of things and moments that simply give us the sense of happiness but nothing else. It is funny to read some of these studies which go at great depths to conclude what Jesus in scripture is revealing: that lasting happiness does not lie in moments of personal achievement, in what we perceive as success. Rather, happiness lies in living a life of meaning and purpose, and purpose is not a moment, purpose is *a way of life*, and this purposeful way of life comes when we stop focusing on our own lives, and simply focus on how we can best be at the service of others, and that actually makes us much more productive.

How does this make sense? Because what comes out of a life of productive service is gratitude... *the focus becomes gratitude for what*

you have, rather than the chase for what you don't, and the cycle is broken.

The Christian goal in life is not the pursuit of happiness, we have already found the source of our joy in Christ, that moment has come in the resurrection. The goal of the Christian is to *live in gratitude*, and what Jesus has left for us in the Church is *the means to live in gratitude*.

The Eucharist, it means “thanksgiving.” Pay attention to how many times the word “thanks” is said at mass... Recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist as the Christ is to recognizing that God is not an obstacle to our happiness but the source of our joy. We can stop searching, and finally start living.

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