

Christmas (B)

Today is a joyful day. A child is born to us. God Himself came down to us, entered time and human history for us. He came to us and took on our humanity, so that we might be raised up to share in His divinity. We are gathered here today to pause, rest, and worship our Lord.

Joy is a word often used this time of year, especially in songs. Many Christmas songs use the word “joy.” *Joy to the World* is a popular Christmas song. Jesus’ birth is always a cause of joy for us who are believers. But looking back to what has happened this year in 2020 there isn’t much to be joyful about. Maybe even some of our joy has been taken away. Today we are reminded again that, no matter what is happening with us collectively or individually, there is always reason to be joyful for we who are Christian.

Looking at the bigger picture, it is sin and temptation that has removed our joy. We are fallen, and some of the effects of the Fall are sadness and despair, and so we are constantly prone giving in to this to anything that might trigger it. Yes, the reason Jesus became one of us was for our salvation. We could not save ourselves. But some of the effects of His coming is joy. What is dull and boring and lame is sin. What is joyful and surprising and exciting is Jesus Christ and His grace. He brought His light to conquer the darkness. He also brings His joy and celebration. I think Jesus and Mary are the most joyful human beings in history simply because they were untouched by sin. They did not feel the effects of the Fall like we do, and so knew real joy and lived it out.

Jesus' grace, whenever we receive it, most especially in the sacraments, restores and renews us. This transformation lies in the reality that we are restored to our pre-fallen state. What was lost is regained. We are created fallen, but are recreated anew in Jesus Christ. This is not just a nice thing to say, that Jesus gives new life. It is quite a real thing, and one of the effects of this new life, this sort of Garden of Eden-like existence is joy. This joy is real. It can transform us. It is also contagious, in that it can positively affect those around us if we are living it out authentically.

There is a Christmas movie that gives us a great illustration of what this joy, unaffected by sin, looks like. The movie is *Elf*. Buddy the Elf shows us what true joy looks like, this joy of Jesus and Mary that is untouched by sin. He is a prelapsarian figure. Prelapsarian means "before the Fall," so Buddy gives us an illustration of human living that does not know sin, or has not been affected by sin. Original justice, original harmony, original innocence, all of these terms are used by the Church to describe the state of existence that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall. This is how Buddy lived in the North Pole.

How do we know that Buddy is prelapsarian? There are two clues. First, this original harmony was something that existed, in part, between man and nature. So, for instance, Adam did not want to hunt animals for food. We see Buddy in the North Pole talking to animals as he heads for New York. Along the way he sees a raccoon and wants to give it a hug because he enjoyed harmony with the animals in North Pole. How does the raccoon react? It wants to bite Buddy's face off because it lives in a condition affected by sin. This is the first clue.

The second is when Buddy is on the date with Jovie. He kisses her on the cheek, but she says he missed. Existence in the Garden before the Fall was one that did not want to take advantage of anyone or anything. There was no selfishness in anyway. This is how Buddy lived, and so he was confused when she said he missed.

The point of this is to show that Buddy possesses a joy that everyone else doesn't know. This is why he appears weird and socially off. The irony is that he is the most human character in the movie. He is filled with other worldly joy and innocence. It seems weird at first, and he gets taken advantage of a little bit, but eventually we see how his joy completely transforms those around him: Jovie sings in public; his brother Michael is happy; his father Walter rediscovers what is most important in life and moves from the naughty to nice list; and ultimately Christmas is saved because of Buddy's joy. Buddy changed those around him because he possessed transformative joy.

Buddy is a fictional character, but we, who are Christian, can possess the same real prelapsarian joy. We always have cause to be joyful, even in 2020. This joy can transform us if we let it. This joy is very contagious, it can spill over to others if we live as authentic Christians.

There is always sadness in the world, even if it seems like there is more to go around now than what we are used to. But may we not give into it. Let us bring the joy of Jesus Christ to those around us. We are all infected with the virus of sin and sadness. May we help to vaccinate the sadness of the world around us with real Christian joy. Merry Christmas!!