



The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord

John 20:20

WHAT IS JOY?

Joy is not an easy subject to articulate. We seem to be a lot better at talking about sorrow. But we have to learn to speak about joy, because joy is the great reward for those who take up the cross and follow Jesus.

Joy is connected to newness. No one ever says, "Oh, there is that old joy again." No! There is old sorrow, but there is no old joy. Joy is always new.

The great challenge is to claim the joy that Jesus offers us. Jesus is the God of the living. Jesus came to break the chain of wounds and needs and to overcome death. He came to give life, and life is joy. "I want my joy to be yours and for your joy to be complete." (John 15:11). Jesus says, "I have come to overcome death and to give you life that does not end."

It is not easy to live this way, because something in us is afraid. There is a resistance to joy. Something in us is tempted to choose death instead of life, to choose the fixed place instead of the place of joy.

Fear does this to us. Fear makes us cling to the fixed place. Fear holds us to the ordinary, to the normal, to where we feel secure.

Joy is a gift that is there even when we are sorrowful, even when we are in pain, even when things are difficult in our lives. The joy that Jesus offers is a joy that exists in very, very difficult situations.

Jesus rewards us with joy. Not only later, but now. Not only in the happy moments but also in our sorrow. Joy is hidden in our suffering and revealed in our communal life.

'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe'

John 20:29

Following Jesus means much more than following a memory of someone. Following Jesus means following the Risen Lord. Following Jesus means the Lord who is the Lord of history, the Lord who is with us now and here, at this moment. It is not a sentimental memory. It is not a pious feeling about someone we hardly know. No. It is being guided by the One who is with us here and now.

It is being led by the One who is really present among us as the Lord, who rose from the dead and became the Lord who embraces all people, in all times, and is therefore the Lord of the now, the present, the here.

Henri Nouwen, *Following Jesus* (Great Britain: SPCK, 2019) excerpts from ch 5

The Joy of the Gospel

POPE FRANCIS

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. n 3

No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord".

The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realise that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.

Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace".

No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards! (n 3)

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice.

"Rejoice!" is the angel's greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary's visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother's womb (cf. Lk 1:41).

In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:47).

When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: "For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled" (Jn 3:29).

Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Lk 10:21).

His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11).

Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (Jn 16:20).

He then goes on to say: "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22).

The disciples "rejoiced" (Jn 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46).

Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52).

The newly baptised eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39),

... while Paul's jailer "and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God" (16:34).

Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy? (n 5)

The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything.

(cf. Jn 16:22). (n 84)