

Joy- Part IV

Isaiah 7:10-14
Psalm 24
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-24

When James and Nicole got married, he was determined to make her happy. The very first morning of their honeymoon, he brought her breakfast in bed. Nicole was not impressed. She looked disdainfully at the tray and said, “Poached? I wanted scrambled eggs!” The next morning, James tried again. He brought his wife breakfast in bed—scrambled eggs. Nicole pushed the tray away and yelled, “I want variety! I wanted poached eggs this morning!” Determined to please his wife, James brought her breakfast the next morning—one poached egg and one scrambled egg. “Here, my love, enjoy!” he said. Jill looked at the plate and said, “You scrambled the wrong egg!”

Marriage is often difficult, but then, so is every vocation. Interestingly, the Bible tells us that, despite the difficulties that are inherent in them, **we can find joy in our vocations**. We have spent the last few weeks looking at how to find authentic joy in life. The Bible explains that joy is ultimately found in our union and relationship with God, but that there are numerous things that can invite us deeper into union with God, including creation and remembering the wonderful things God has done for us. This week, we are going to look at how we can find joy in our vocation.¹

There are two basic ways in which our vocation can lead us deeper into God’s Presence and, therefore, deeper into joy. The first way is when God uses our vocation to lighten our workload, make our lives a blessing, remind us of who He is, and stir up gratitude in our hearts. The second way is when God allows our workload to increase and things get harder and more challenging; we are reminded of who we are and we are invited to grow in humility.

Let’s look at the first way in which our vocation can bring us joy. An example of this sort of joy regarding the vocation of marriage can be found in the book of Proverbs when the author writes—

A virtuous and worthy wife... is a crowning joy to her husband...
-Proverbs 12:4a (*Amplified Bible*)

The father of a just man will exult with glee; he who begets a wise son will have joy in him. Let your father and mother have joy; let her who bore you exult.
-Proverbs 23:24-25

These Scriptures paint a beautiful image of the vocation of marriage being a source of joy. They reflect a certain lightness and blessing. The first verse is about a man who has experienced God’s care for him through the virtue and worth of his wife. The second passage has to do with parents who have been blessed by the conduct and character of their children. Such blessings remind parents that God is good and fills them with gratitude and joy!

As many of you know, there are times in one’s vocation when things aren’t “light” and don’t quickly feel like a blessing; rather, they are challenging—time when nothing seems to be

¹ A beautiful Scriptural example of someone who found joy in his vocation is John the Baptist. In John 3:28-30, we hear a great description of John’s vocation and how he understood who he was and how to find joy.

going as we had expected. Yet, Scripture tells us that these, too, are times for joy. The author of the book of Habakkuk describes such joy regarding the vocation of one who tends a farm, writing—

For though the fig tree blossom not
nor fruit be on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive fail
and the terraces produce no nourishment,
Though the flocks disappear from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
Yet will I rejoice in the LORD
and exult in my saving God.

-Habakkuk 3:17-18

If we apply Habakkuk's response to hardships to the vocation of marriage, maybe it would sound something like this—

For though my spouse does not meet my expectations
nor love me the way I desire,
Though my children frequently disappoint me
and turn from the ways that I have shown them,
Though my hard work go without recognition
and there be no appreciation for me,
Yet will I rejoice in the LORD
and exult in my saving God.

How do we find joy in our vocations when the workload increases and we are challenged? The key is to let it be a reminder that—1) God has chosen us, 2) He is reminding us about who we are to Him, 3) and we are being invited to grow in humility. In order to find joy in our vocations through this second mode, we must understand that God is using it to deepen the life of Christ within us. It can be growth. Father Jacques Philippe put it this way—

The worse thing that could happen would be for everything to go exactly as we wanted it, for that would be the end of any growth.

-Interior Freedom

The story I told at the beginning of this sermon was obviously meant to be a joke, but we could apply this teaching on joy to it. How in the world can that husband find joy in his wife's lack of gratitude and extreme expectations? If he focuses on his wife's reaction as simply a rejection of him, then he will not experience joy in his vocation. However, if he lets the experience remind him that God has *chosen him* to serve her—to lay down his life for her—and that his service is special to God, he will be humbled by his continued attempts to please his wife and he will be filled with joy. It will no longer be “unappreciated work,” but rather, an offering pleasing to God (hence union with God and joy!).

While I have been looking specifically at marriage so far, these same principles can be applied to every vocation. God taught me this lesson regarding my own vocation to the priesthood using funerals. I used to feel guilty when I would be away from the parish and not be available to celebrate the funeral of a parishioner. Now, I see such circumstances as God's eagerness to lighten my workload, bless me with rest, and remind me that He cares for me. This has taught me that God is good and it fills my heart with gratitude and joy. Conversely, there are times when I am inundated with funerals.

I have learned that such times in my priesthood challenge me to remember that God has chosen me for a very special task and He has given me very specific gifts to fulfill that task. Such situations fill me with tremendous humility. I remember being called to the hospital to anoint two people who were dying. The next week I was going to be leaving town to visit my brother. As I prayed for the people who were dying, I reminded God about my trip and prayed that His will would be done. I ended up celebrating both of their funerals and a third one right before I left town. While in the early years of my priesthood I would have been angry at God for the extra work, I now found myself filled with joy that God had *chosen me* to celebrate their funerals. I was humbled by the fact that God could have arranged for any priest to have been involved in the lives of those grieving families, but He chose *me*. It filled me with joy!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read John 3:29-30. It is a description of John the Baptist's vocation as the "best man" of the Bridegroom, Jesus. Where does John find joy in his vocation?
- ✚ Recall and meditate on a specific time in your vocation when you found joy in the first mode (when God lightened your workload, blessed you, cared for you, reminded you about who He is for you, and deepened your gratitude) and then in the second mode (when God increased your workload, challenged you, reminded you about who you are to Him, and deepened your humility).