

## Christian Joy

- *14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*
- *July 8, 2019*
- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

Sometimes you just can't miss what the scripture readings of a Sunday are urging. Today it is:

- Fill your faithful with holy joy!
- Rejoice with Jerusalem!
- When you see this, your heart will rejoice.
- Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.
- Shout joyfully to God, all the earth!
- Let us rejoice in him and in the gospel.
- Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Do you think the theme of these readings in the middle of summer just might be about joy and rejoicing?! What is this call to joy in our Christian lives and what kind of joy are we given?

We gather in the Chapel of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The chapel itself is architecturally shaped around the spiritual joys of St. Ignatius. The chapel is designed with what the architect called seven bottles or scoops of light. These are based on the lights, the inspirations or illuminations, Ignatius received from God in his life. So our chapel is not just called the Chapel of St Ignatius of Loyola but it is the very shape of the life and light Ignatius found in God. When we enter this chapel we enter into the experience of Ignatius. We enter in the joy, his joy, the Christian joy we are called to.

In his famous Spiritual Exercises Ignatius comes to the culmination of the gospel contemplations of Jesus in the resurrection. He directs us in contemplating Christ risen to ask for a specific grace: "Ask for the grace to be glad and rejoice intensely because of the great joy and the glory of Christ our Lord." Note that it is the grace—i.e., given by God not manufactured by us—of an intense joy because of the great joy that the risen Christ now has. Here is the essence of Christian joy: joy in Christ risen working within others, saving, healing, forgiving, lifting up, loving, bringing them with him to eternal life. Christ can now do this and is doing it because he is risen and he can pour out his spirit on people. Receiving the grace of his intense rejoicing is not easy because it is not the short-circuited joy of simply taking pleasure in ourselves—though there is nothing wrong with that—but rather entering into the joy of Jesus risen and alive and active, he rejoicing to be able now to bring his saving love to all. Ignatius asks us to find our joy in imagining and knowing and entering into the joy of the Risen Christ, in short to find our joy in his joy. That's a grace and that is the shape of this chapel with its bottles of light and illumination.

In his autobiography Ignatius tells of five illuminations he had at Manresa and along the bank of the River Cardoner: 1) the Holy Trinity like three musical notes; 2) how God created the world as if rays of white light came out of God; 3) the Eucharist with white rays coming down from above showing how Jesus is present in this sacrament; 4) the very humanity of Christ as if filled

with light; and finally, 5) a great illumination of his understanding of many things of the spirit, of faith, and of learning. He says that so strong were these illuminations that even if there were no scriptures he would die for what God revealed to him in these ways, that everything he subsequently studied in theology did not begin to match up to what he received along that river at that time, and that in all of these illuminations he experienced “great joy and consolation”. Note that none of these joys was about him, none was a revelation to him that he was enough or okay, or great, or that he should be happy. They were all about joy that was other-directed, to God, to Church, to the sacraments, to creation, to the Spirit working in the people of God. Again this is Christian joy, joy in the other, joy in what God in Christ is doing in others, rejoicing in others. The very shapes of the bottles or scoops of light of this chapel are representations of these illuminations of joy of Ignatius and are meant to help us have the same light and joy in God, in Christ risen, in the spirit, in others. Don’t get me wrong, we do experience joy in ourselves, the grace of joy, but it comes not as an achievement or as belonging to us, but rather it comes from the capacity to go out of ourselves in loving and rejoicing in others.

I’ve mentioned five illuminations of joy of Ignatius. There are seven bottles of light in this chapel. Let me give you two more joys of Ignatius, more simple ones. In his room in Rome where Ignatius labored for 15 years forming the Society of Jesus and where he in the end died, there was a small window. He loved at night to look up through that window at the stars and he would be rapt in joy at the beauty of God shown in creation. Make that our sixth bottle of light. And for fun, for our seventh and last bottle of light, know that Ignatius who perennially suffered from stomach pains and could not eat much, loved to place a couple fat young Jesuits next to him at table and take great delight, great joy, in watching how much they could eat and how much they enjoyed it. There, too, is his taking joy not in oneself but in others, our seventh scoop of light.

Our gospel ends with one final joy. I, too, end with that and with a poem that opens up what the gospel says. Jesus says to the disciples, boasting in coming back from ministry in his name that even the demons were subject to them. Jesus says to them:

“Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

So here is a final joy promised us. The joy of heaven, where there will be no need to enter into the joy of the Risen Christ because we will ourselves be in him. That joy, however, is not for now, but for later. For now we have work to do which is, as in the poem I will now read, to be “love’s apprentice”, the apprentice of Christ in his love of others. Here’s a poem by Anne Porter who is given a glimpse of the joy of heaven where our names are written. It is called “A Night in Ireland”.

Our steamship docked at night  
 In Cobh, an Irish seaport  
 A small one in those days

Not an inn, not a tavern was open  
 And we had to wait till morning  
 For the train to Fermoy

But in the wooded hills  
Up above the town  
Nightingales were awake  
All the dark thickets  
Were rich with their songs

It was on that night  
And in those woods  
I dreamed that I found the door  
Of all doors the most hidden  
And most renowned

Overgrown with nettles  
Rustic and low  
Built as if for children  
Or as a gate for sheep  
In some back-country pasture

And through a chink in the door  
I saw the marvelous light  
That's purest of all lights  
Neither sun nor moon  
Nor any star I know of  
Could give such light

And I saw the crowds of the blessed  
From the greatest to the smallest  
The smallest were running and laughing  
And Christ the Lord was with them  
And also Mary

But before I could knock at the door  
Someone spoke to me  
I think it was an angel

He said You've come too soon  
Go back into the towns  
Live there as love's apprentice  
And God will give you his kingdom

I woke up just before sunrise  
When the nightingales ended their songs  
Dew gathered on the ferns  
And the cool woods  
Gave off a scent of earth  
In the early morning

I was hungry and cold  
And I started back to the town  
At the first signs of day

Already a sunlit smoke  
Was rising from the chimneys  
And mist from the water

I heard a rooster crowing  
And then I heard the whistle  
Of the train to Fermoy.

Indeed, let's rejoice because our names are written in heaven, but now it is time for us to be "love's apprentice" and in doing that to enter into our Lord's joy that is offered us here and now.