

WIFE to husband: "I have a bag full of used clothing I'd like to donate."

HUSBAND: "Why not just throw it into the trash? That's much easier."

WIFE: "But there are poor starving people who can really use all these clothes."

HUSBAND: "Honey, let's be honest, anyone who fits into your clothing is not starving."

Husband is currently in the hospital with a head injury.

Happy Gaudete, or Rejoicing Sunday!

Some of you may have seen a wonderful little Italian film that hit American box offices in 1998 titled LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL. Italian actor Roberto Benigni won the Academy Award for this unconventional film that was set in the concentration camps of World War II. Benigni is quite an exuberant man, and in his joy over winning the Academy Award, literally danced over the tops of chairs and leaped on stage to receive the award.

Afterwards, when reporters questioned him about this display of joyful abandon, he replied, "It's a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with moderation." I love that! "It's a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with moderation." On this REJOICING SUNDAY, the scriptures invite us to be grateful without moderation, and to be joyful without moderation.

But let me share a piece by Michael Newnham entitled "OF CATS AND PEOPLE"

"Lord, this cat you gave me....she just doesn't listen. I told her the rain was coming....she goes out anyway and comes back soaked. I told her not to lie in weeds...yet every day she comes in and expects me to pull all the stickers out of her fur....from lying in the weeds. I told her that as much as it's up to her to be at peace with all cats.....yet she expects me to tend to her wounds from the fights she is always in.

"She embarrasses me in front of the neighbors by instigating disputes with their cats....she thinks she owns the whole block. She is constantly doing what she ought not to do and suffering the consequences. Worse, she seems to blame all her misfortunes on me....at least she expects me to deal with all the results of her disobedience. I always do, but she never seems to learn. Furthermore, Lord....she has never missed a meal, but when she's hungry she yowls as if she hasn't had a meal in weeks.

'She makes it sound as if I'm a negligent and cruel father. The truth is that I always feed her and even give her treats. Just wanted you to know....To top it all off, she is often distant and ignores me until she wants attention or me to provide something. This can makes me feel used. Sometimes I wonder if she loves me, or just loves what I can give her. It's a pretty one-sided relationship. Despite all of this, I love the cat and I've chosen to keep her. Lord, that makes no sense, but I know you'll understand."

We are very fortunate people. Ultimately, we need not fear anything. Why? Because the Father is crazy about us. He loves us. More than a cat-lover with 16 cats! Which then brings me to my three points. Do we know what God's will is for our lives? People ask me, is this God's will for me? Is that God's will? Did such-and-such happen because of God's will? God's will for our life is right here in our second reading from 1 Thessalonians 5.

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstance, this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” There it is from God’s word in black and white. God’s will is for us to be joyful, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances.

So first, rejoice always. We do not feel joy always. In fact, we feel true joy only occasionally. We feel contentment rather frequently, especially if our hopes and desires and ideals are fairly modest – for instance, in eating a good meal, having a good night’s sleep. And we feel happiness less frequently than contentment, because happiness is deeper and more precious than contentment; but we all do have moments of happiness – for instance, when we have completed a job that is both worth doing and well done, whether it’s weeding the entire garden or getting a full recovery from a disease or seeing our children or our friends in a loving and happy marriage. But just as happiness is deeper and rarer and higher than contentment, joy is even deeper and rarer and higher than happiness. We probably remember only a few moments of deep joy – a wedding day, the birth of a child. Joy is always surprising --which shows how rare it is. How can we feel that joy, that ‘high,’ always? We can’t. It’s psychologically impossible.

Well that’s true if joy is only a subjective, personal feeling. But joy is another person – Jesus Christ – He is our joy. Then, if we have Jesus always, we have joy always, whether we feel it or not. We have it by faith, not by feeling. St. James says, at the beginning of his epistle, “Consider it all joy, my brothers (and sisters), when you encounter various trials.” (James 1:2). He does not command us to FEEL a trial as joy – which is impossible – but to COUNT it as joy, to RECKON it as joy, to KNOW it as joy, to know it by faith, to BELIEVE it as joy. Which makes us ask the question, do we worship our own feelings, or do we worship God, and therefore, truth, because God IS truth?

We can have joy even in sorrow, as Jesus gave us the example of a woman in labor, and as Hebrews 12:2 reminds us, saying of Jesus “For the sake of the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross.” Joy does not necessarily remove sorrow. We can be sorrowful that someone we love has died, but we have joy that they have reached heaven, and their suffering has ended. In many ways, to have JOY is a choice. It is to choose Christ in a situation, whether the situation is easy or difficult, happy or sad. If we choose Christ, we have chosen a deep river of joy, but we must be honest that that river often runs underground.

Second, pray always. Prayer can exist in our subconscious mind always, even though it can’t be in the conscious mind always. There are things that are very much alive and real in us all the time even when we don’t consciously attend to them, like our relationships with our family, or our friendships. A parent hugs their kids, but are not consciously thinking “These are my kids,” but a parent hugs them differently than they hug their spouse or other people’s kids.

That’s how we can pray always. If we make a Morning Offering every day to God, that makes everything we do that day into a prayer, because we know that even when we forget God, God never forgets us, so we are always in that relationship to God that is called prayer and adoration, even we are not thinking about it.

Eastern spirituality has emphasized that we can pray if realize that every breath is a gift of God, and therefore every breath can be a prayer. Many theologians think that the name ‘Yah-weh’ came from this notion of God-in-every-breath. It’s there in the pronouncing of the name – ‘Yah-weh.’

And third, “in all circumstances give thanks?” We can give thanks even when we don’t feel thankful, like, “Thanks, I needed that” after a rude shock or a rude awakening that we don’t enjoy but we know we needed. Thanksgiving is a giving, an action, an act of will. It is not a feeling. Feelings are passive; they come

over us. We are not commanded to feel or not feel things; we are commanded to do or not do things – and giving thanks is a doing; giving thanks is a choice. It's a choice that enlarges our heart whenever we do it and that narrows and constricts and squeezes the life out of our heart when we refuse to do it, both to other human beings and above all to God.

If we pray and mean the most fundamental of all prayers, "Thy will be done," then it necessarily follows that we are saying 'thanks' to God for everything, even the pains; that we are saying to God about them, even before they happen, "Thanks, I needed that." Because God infallibly knows what we do really need for our own good. God makes no mistakes; that's why we can pray "Thy will be done" always.

Now this is not easy by any means. But it's right, and it's good. And it's always possible. God does not command the impossible. But He often asks things that are difficult. (these 3 points taken from Kreeft, FOOD FOR THE SOUL, CYCLE B, p. 54-57)

Knowing that these three things are the will of God leads to a life of peace, contentment, even joy. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. Amen.