

Ours Is a Quiet Joy Taken in Little Moments

By DOLORES CURRAN

Whenever we Christians talk about joy, it's in grandiose terms connected with Easter, weddings, First Communion and the like. This is fine but it ignores the little joys that make life worthwhile.

Our lives are made up of quiet joys, not spectacular ones. These little joys abound in our lives but frequently we're too rushed and too harassed to recognize them.

Joy shouldn't be reserved for the GREAT DAYS but passed around for the little ones. We need to sharpen up our sensibilities and see joy where it exists. As parents, we particularly need to show joy when it exists so that our children will learn to recognize and cherish it.

Let's enumerate some of the real joys in family life, like reading the thermometer and

discovering your child's high fever has broken.

Or experiencing the joy of reunion, of seeing dear ones again after a year's separation, of knowing that no matter how great the distance in miles or years, the mutual joy in being together is treasured.

There's the joy of being able to disagree with your spouse, knowing that neither of you will get angry.

And the joy of watching your children enjoy each other.

And the blessed joy of silence after children's bedtime.

And the creative joy of finishing a dress or a flower bed or a buffet top.

Then, there's the relieved joy in knowing you don't have to go anywhere tonight.

And the enormous joy of knowing our astronauts are back safe.

And the joy of finding friends who are happy over your success.

Let's not forget our joy in watching the toddler's satisfaction the first time he navigates the living room by himself.

Or the joy we feel in seeing a beautiful picture—or girl.

Or from a phone call from someone we didn't know was passing through.

Or when we hear the teacher say, "She's so considerate of others."

Or when we meet a new friend and know immediately this is going to be an old friend some day.

Or when we see the faces of oldsters light up from the warmth around them.

Or when we stumble upon a treasure we thought we lost.

Or when our husband winks at us in a full room.

Let's add the joy of accomplishing something difficult, whether it's a new recipe or a new language.

And the joy of helping others achieve something—tying shoelaces, having a great first date or finishing a mountain cabin.

And the joy of seeing children's eyes at a home Mass.

And the joy of reading to children snuggling close who would rather hear a story than watch TV.

And the joy of hearing an older person say, "Maybe there's something to what the kids are saying."

And the joy of hearing a young person say, "Hey, he's



Joy is Laughter

"... the joy of watching your children enjoy each other." But this is only one of the many opportunities each day to either experience or observe the joy of life around us. (NC Photo by Frank Hoy)

pretty neat for an old man of 40."

And the joy of seeing thousands of adults who are optimistic about today's kids and today's church.

Yes, there are hundreds of joyful opportunities in our daily lives if we learn to watch for them. Likewise, if we find ourselves looking (a) for fears and disappointments, we will find them and ignore the joys. It's up to us which way we want to go in our family lives.

In closing, I'm using a story which may sound familiar at

this moment of summer to most parents. A mother of several young children began drawing attention by her peculiar behavior. Every vacation day she pushed the stroller and directed her children toward their school, where she sat among overgrown grass and weeds to meditate. Finally, an administrator asked her what she was doing.

She waved her hand at her bouncy children and replied, "I get a quiet joy out of knowing that this building is here, waiting..."

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KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FR. RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. From past Church history (Spanish Inquisition, etc.) we have discovered that the separation of Church and State is a good policy to follow. Why, then, has the Church suddenly thrust herself into areas bordering on the political again, like the union problems of Caesar Chavez?

A. The separation of Church and State can mean one of two things: (1) a constitutional separation whereby the independence of the Church is protected; or (2) a complete moral separation whereby the Church takes no interest at all in matters of social, economic, or political import.

A constitutional separation of Church and State means, on the one hand, that the State will do nothing to obstruct the work of the Church and, on the other hand, that the Church will neither seek nor accept any special privileges which might give it an unfair advantage over other comparable groups within the political society.

A total moral separation means that the Church will concern itself with religious matters only: worship, catechesis, preaching, doctrinal instruction, devotions, and so forth. How society is otherwise structured (e.g., system of taxation, housing, social services, labor-management relations, foreign policy, and so forth) is a matter of interest for the State alone.

Constitutional separation of Church and State has very much in its favor; complete moral separation has always been rejected by the Church, and most recently in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (n. 43):

This has also been the consistent witness of the great social encyclicals of modern times, from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* to Pope VI's *Populorum Progressio*.

Where there are cries for justice, the Christian community cannot ignore them. Where there is bitter division, as in a prolonged labor dispute, the Church cannot turn its back in a gesture of supreme indifference. The Church exists to enable God's presence to break through, to allow Him to reconcile what is divided and heal what is wounded.

Q. Our parish curate is a fine young man, but he stirred up a real hornet's nest recently while addressing the parents of the First Communion class. First of all, he said that the children did not have to receive the sacrament of Penance before going to Communion and that we could wait several years before encouraging our children to go to Confession. He also said that we shouldn't bother bringing our children to Church for First Communion if we weren't faithful churchgoers ourselves.

A. Theologically, he is right about the first point. There is no necessary connection between the sacrament of Penance and the reception of Holy Communion, except where serious sin is involved. The practice of delaying Confession for a few years (or at least to separate it in some way from Communion) is gaining ground in several dioceses.

The young curate is probably right about the second point as well, although it is easy to see how his remarks could be misunderstood. First Communion is not some kind of social event, a time primarily for picture-taking and partying. It represents the moment when a young Christian is introduced to the fullest expression of the Church's life and worship. If there is no reasonable hope that this young child will continue in his commitment to the Church, then First Communion should be delayed.

COURIER 2

Joy - The Tree of Life

By FR. CARL PFEIFER

One of the last places most people would expect to look for an example of joy is in a concentration camp. Yet when I think of joy, my mind spontaneously recalls a young woman who died in a death camp. Victor Frankl describes the scene in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. The young woman was near death when Frankl, a doctor and fellow inmate, came to see how she was doing.

Surprisingly she was cheerful; although she was fully aware that death was at most a few days off. Pointing to a tree that was visible through a window in the hut where she lay, she told the doctor that she frequently talked to the tree. Through the window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree with two blossoms on the branch. Frankl was startled and wondered if she were delirious. Hesitantly he asked her if the tree ever replied. "Yes," she answered, "it said to me, 'I am here — I am here — I am here — I am here, eternal life.'"

This true story reads like a poem. It is not unlike some of the Psalms which this Jewish woman probably knew from her youth. She reveals a joy that is so deeply a part of her that it could withstand one of the most despair-filled, gloomy environments invented in man's history. Her joy is not the result merely of a light-hearted disposition, nor is it a passing feeling of good humor.

Hardly any one of us could be anything but envious of a young woman who could smile with joy in the face of death. Joy is something desperately

sought after in our society, marked as it is by loneliness, alienation, poverty, unrest, discrimination and despair. Young and old seek a joy that seems always just out of reach. Peppills, "joy-rides," constant diversion, unremitting work all fail to bring to empty hearts the fullness of joy, or even a small measure of it. Suicide rates not only increase each year, but take a greater toll of the young who find so little joy in life that it appears easier to end it all. Others pursue joy through sensitivity training, psychedelic experiences, or hallucinogenic drugs.

It is one of life's most disconcerting paradoxes that what is of greatest value is free. It cannot be bought but received as a gift. This is true of love; it is also true of joy. The more a person grasps after it or attempts to induce it, the more elusive it becomes. Clutch at joy or happiness selfishly and it is gone. Seek it for self-gratification and it will never be found. True joy can only be received as a gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) by those who reject self-indulgence — which is not to imply rejection of a healthy self-love and enjoyment of life's legitimate pleasures.

The deep joy that can bring a smile to a woman dying at Dachau is a joy that can be found only by looking to God with a hopeful faith and to other people with compassionate concern. Joyful fulfillment is given by the Holy Spirit to those who gradually learn to live for others, trusting that God is with them, aware of their every need (Mt. 6:25-34). What allows the human heart to expand with joy is what St.

Paul calls "faith that is active in love" (Gal 5:6).

Jesus Himself tells us of His "commandments" of faith and love "so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete" (Jn 15:10-11). Faithful trust in God and compassion for others enables a person to forget his own self-seeking long enough to rejoice in the mystery of God's love discernible in daily life. The person who is preoccupied with his own attempts to secure happiness is blind to all the marvels of life graced by the presence of so gracious a God.

Perhaps this sounds lofty and pious, remote from the real world of struggle and frustration, success and failure, work and play. St. Paul, who recognized joy as a sign of the presence of the Spirit of Love, jars us back to the ordinariness of daily routine.

His formula for discovering Christian joy is spelled out very concretely as the fruition of love expressed in so many situations of life. "Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes" (1 Cor 13:4-7).

This is the daily, ordinary, unromantic "stuff" of love. This is the kind of "faith that is active in love," that opens man's heart wide enough for the Holy Spirit to fill it with joy — this growing capacity to trust God enough to be able to think of others' needs. There is no other formula for joy in Christian life.