

## How do we maintain joy in ministry?

Holy Family parish  
Staff and Pastoral Council recollection  
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How do we maintain joy in general?

This is the more immediate and the more basic question.

How do we maintain joy in general?

If we can maintain joy in general,

that is, in the various circumstances of daily life,

then we ought to be able to maintain joy in ministry.

Ministry does have its particular challenges—indeed.

But if we find the key to joy for all circumstances,  
we will surely be able to maintain joy in ministry.

As we will see, it is nonetheless important to underscore  
that ministry does have its particular challenges

and that there is a particular focus

that is required to maintain joy.

But also, it is equally important to underscore

that there is a unique opportunity for joy in ministry.

We do well to ask: **what is joy?**

A good question.

An interesting question.

A very human question.

A *philosophical* question—and eventually, a *theological* question.

Now, in philosophy, we always begin with the first analogue.

In other words, when we try to understand something in human life

(philosophy is wisdom about human life in all its dimensions)

we begin with the most immediate experience and,

from there, consider analogically the deeper,

somewhat less immediate experience.

To understand joy, for example, we begin by looking at the emotion of joy.

In the emotional realm, in the world of passions,

we discover that the most basic emotion is love.

All the other emotions  
(and, according to Thomas Aquinas, there are 11 basic emotions)  
hinge on that of love.

We hate because we first love.

We fear because we first love.

We are sad because we first love.

We are joyous because we first love.

*Love* is attraction for that which is good.  
The good is the reality which attracts,  
and which brings a certain completion.

For example, I love chocolate.

And believe you me: chocolate completes me  
—well, at least in a certain way, at a certain level.

Love is essentially an attraction to “the good”.

When that which attracts—and thus loved—is had, is possessed, there is joy.

Note that at this more immediate level of “goods”,  
at the level of chocolate, the joy is more commonly *pleasure*.

When I *have* the chocolate, when I am *eating* the chocolate,  
I am joyous, I experience pleasure.

Trust me!

Joy, therefore, always follows love.

And this holds true at every level:

from the more immediate level of tangible things like chocolate or beer  
to the deeper, more substantial, even spiritual “good”:

another person to God Himself.

That joy follows love is an important discovery.

For it means that, if you want to be joyous, be loving,

i.e. pursue that which attracts you

—pursue that which attracts you attracts at a deeper level, of course.

Joy follows love.

Joy is experienced when we rest in the good which attracts.

Thomas Aquinas says the following (I II Q. 32 art 5).

**“Two things are requisite for joy, namely, the attainment of one’s proper good, and the knowledge of having obtained it.”**

Joy is experienced when we rest in the good which attracts *and we know it!*

Now, we mentioned different levels, so to speak.

The type of “good” will, understandably, determine the type of joy:

- *chocolate* makes for a particular type of joy
- *an interesting lecture* makes for a particular type of joy
- *another person* makes for a particular type of joy
- *God* makes for a particular type of joy

This should be fairly easy to discern.

It is also fairly easy to discern how easily we gravitate towards the more immediate goods

—like the chocolate, the cars, the jewels, the television and the houses, those goods the possession of which produce a very tangible joy felt in our bodies.

No brainer.

Why do we do this?

Why do we get entangled so easily in material and bodily pleasures?

Precisely because no-brainer.

We move without thinking, without effort, towards that which brings such pleasure.

Such “goods” are very tangible, and they engage us in a sub-rational way, and the joy they cause when possessed is more manifest.

Keeping this in check is what we call virtue.

Virtues—two of four cardinal virtues to be precise

—are acquired dispositions to deal with what we call “sensible goods”, material, bodily things that bring pleasure.

Temperance and fortitude: you do not hear much talk about them nowadays.

They are not hot commodities on the market of what we are told to pursue.

Lindsay Lohan is never praised for her temperance or her fortitude.

Go figure.

By the way: virtue is acquired—which means there is still hope for us!

The joy of which I would like to speak with you,  
the joy we seek to maintain in our ministry, is of a different order.  
It is not that of reclining on a comfortable sofa, in front of a fire,  
eating chocolate and drinking champagne.  
We do try to maintain some of this more immediate joy in our ministry.  
This is why you have new offices!  
In the work place that is the parish, we have candies, and comfortable chairs,  
and nice bathrooms, etc.  
But the good the possession of which brings the joy I seek to underscore  
is beyond all of these,  
indeed is invisible, intangible, tasteless, odorless, and silent.  
Hmmm.

Let me resituate our ministry,  
in the context of which we are invited to maintain joy.  
The reason for our ministry is *Christ*.  
It is that simple.  
Christ calls us and fills us and moves us.  
He is the reference in all that we do.  
He is the reason we do what we do in ministry.  
And everything we do is, in a sense, ministerial.  
Tell yourself, that it is all important.  
From the greeting at the door, to the note you leave,  
to the person mourning you console, to the planning of a construction project,  
to the homily preached.

Now, we are given three particular, special gifts whereby  
we are in relationship with Christ:  
Faith, hope, and love—“and the greatest of these is love”, as Saint Paul says.  
Love, divine love, traditionally called “charity”,  
binds our heart to that of Christ.  
Christ is our “good”, the Good.  
In fact, he is goodness itself, source of all good.

If I may again quote Thomas Aquinas—because he is awesome (!):  
**“He is in those who love him by his most excellent effect, according to  
John (4:16): ‘He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him’.”**  
Thomas Aquinas then proceeds to state:  
**“There can be spiritual joy about God in two ways.  
First, when we rejoice in God Himself;**

**secondly when we rejoice in God as participated by us.”** (I II Q. 32 art 5). Thus, the joy of which I speak, which we can and must maintain in ministry, is this spiritual, and it is, in a sense, twofold:

- we rejoice in God Himself, because he is God and he is full of joy
- we rejoice in *participating* in His life and *sharing* in his joy

Indeed, Jesus expresses his intention to share his joy to his disciples:

**“That my joy may be in you, and your joy be complete.”** (John 15: 11)

I realize that this may sound somewhat lofty.

Let me try to put it in other terms.

How do we maintain joy in ministry?

There is a mysterious joy that can be ours.

If we have been given a love that binds us to Jesus, *the Good* in our life, and joy follows love, then all we must do is exercise that love.

In loving we “possess” Jesus, and we will have joy.

In fact, we will, by virtue of communion with him, experience his joy.

Thus, we are not to seek joy. We are to seek to love, to love him.

Now, we also possess Jesus—or, more precisely, are *possessed by* Jesus, by virtue of hope, in hope.

What does this mean?

The situation of a pilgrim is an unusual one.

We are in relationship with God, with Jesus, and yet we are on our way.

We are bound to Jesus, yet not fully in possession of him.

We possess him *by hope*.

By hope, we cling to Jesus who makes this pilgrimage possible, who makes it possible for us to reach the *perfect* union to which we are called.

Thus, the exercise of hope leads to spiritual joy.

When things get rough, we can and must exercise the hope that is given us.

When Saint Paul, says, “God works for the good through all things for those who love him”, he is inspiring intense hope.

I may not see, at the time, how my ministerial efforts will bear fruit, will come to fruition, what purpose they serve.

But I know, in faith, that they will bear fruit and do serve a purpose, and, by hope, I already possess their fruition.

*Others* may be the ones to enjoy the fruits.

That is God’s prerogative.

We must keep in mind that there is so much more than meets the eye.  
We are in relationship with God now, and we look forward to it in fullness.  
Listen to a portion of poem from Saint Therese:

**My heaven is God alone, the Trinity Divine,  
Who dwells within my heart, the Prisoner of my love.  
There, contemplating Thee, I tell Thee Thou art mine;  
Thee will I love and serve until we meet above.  
My heaven it is to smile on Thee whom I adore,  
E'en when, to try my faith, from me Thou hidest Thee;  
Calmly on Thee to smile, until Thou smil'st once more,-  
Oh, this is heaven to me!**

Now, some of you may be thinking that this sounds fine and dandy,  
but that there are days where there is little joy, or joy is elusive,  
that too much heaviness is weighing upon any prospects for joy.  
What are we to do when this happens?  
Do we just grin and bear it, and look forward to joy later.  
Do we console ourselves by saying, **“This won’t last forever.”**  
This is the perspective some have on heaven.  
It is for later. In the meantime, we live in the “learning of lessons” zone.

I recall something very important told us often in seminary  
—which was totally liberating.  
“Wanting to believe is already believing.”  
We can and must also say that  
“Wanting to hope is already hoping”  
“Wanting to love us already loving.”

When things get rough, when the shaving cream hits the fan,  
want to hope and want to love.  
The spiritual joy which we must maintain in ministry is both  
a gift and an act of the will.  
It sounds contradictory, does it not?  
It is not.  
It is a mysterious cooperation in which God (always) takes the initiative.

I had mentioned that there is in fact a unique opportunity for joy in ministry.  
In ministry, we seek to be instruments of God’s love.  
Such is the entire purpose of ministry.  
Such is evangelization in the deep sense.

The Church, the parish, ministry, is entirely God's realm.  
These do not have the same natural foundation as other areas of our lives:  
family, work, play—which are all first natural realities.  
In ministry, if we are not instruments of God's love, there is not much left!  
If ministry is uniquely about being instruments of God's love,  
and God's love is cause of spiritual joy,  
then there is a *unique* opportunity for joy in ministry.

On a final note: spiritual joy is a foretaste of the joy that will be ours forever.  
If I may close with a quote from Thomas Aquinas (again!):

**Joy is full, when there remains nothing to be desired.  
But as long as we are in this world, the movement of desire  
does not cease in us, because it still remains possible for us  
to approach nearer to God by grace, as was shown above (24, 4,7). When  
once, however, perfect happiness has been attained,  
nothing will remain to be desired, because then there will be  
full enjoyment of God, wherein man will obtain  
whatever he had desired, even with regard to other goods,  
according to Psalm 102:5: "Who satisfieth thy desire with good things."  
Hence desire will be at rest, not only our desire for God,  
but all our desires: so that the joy of the blessed is full to perfection--  
indeed over-full, since they will obtain more than they were capable  
of desiring: for "neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what  
things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).  
(I II Q. 32 art 5).**