

Hopeful Living



My Joy within You

(John 15, 11)

When was the last time that you found yourself *really* happy? Do you remember the feeling? A feeling as though you want to literally *burst* with vivacity, as though you want to embrace the whole world or at least the next person close by... a feeling of ease and buoyancy which is simply catching? Every time a rocket take-off, aimed at getting into orbit a manned space station, went successful – same as its return to earth later – then the live images from the Control Centres would clearly show the state of high tension give way to a torrent of joy and enthusiasm.

What – actually – is "joy"? It is the resting of the soul after it got its longing fulfilled.

When, for example, you have become all engrossed in a football match – over ninety minutes sweating it out, so to speak – then the final whistle following a goal full-time lead seals its victory. The soul may now "lean back" and feel happy.

Joy – the resting of the soul after getting its longing fulfilled

In June 2004, the 95th General Assembly of German Catholics ("Katholiken-Tag") was held in Ulm. I was among the participants from beginning to end. Most of the time, I found myself at the Schönstatt Information Desk in one of the Exhibition Halls. After eleven years of serving the Movement in Austria, it was at this information stand where I met many good old German friends – met them again after many years. What a joyful meeting! And then – on the day before last, around supper-time, in the mess-hall tent named "Oasis Inshallah" not far from the Cathedral – I met a man with whom I had been in Berlin in 1978. And if it hadn't been for this other one who knew us both and introduced us, we would have run past each other without recognition. But – as it happened – it turned out a joyful occasion for us both.

On that Saturday afternoon I visited an event which was led by a young man with whom I had been in frequent working contact in the Limburg Diocese during the early nineties. He had not in the least expected my showing up there, but, obviously, he was very pleased to see me. And I was happy for him – learning what had become of him.

When joy is the resting state of the soul that follows upon fulfilment of a certain desire or longing, *then* there are moments, instances, where after a long time of deliberate nourishing, this particular longing or desire becomes a reality in the end. When joy takes you by surprise, it is usually the reaction to dormant desires having come true all of a sudden. Something like that is possible when people meet people and also when people – to include the individual person – meet God. Blaise Pascal, mathematician and philosopher, was granted such an unexpected, intensive encounter with God. Shortly afterwards, he wrote down on a piece of parchment his feelings and impressions, his thoughts and his decisions and sewed it (the parchment) into his overcoat, so to keep it close to his heart. The note was found – after he had died – still sewn into his coat. It hadn't been known to anybody, and Pascal had never talked about 'it' (i.e. his conversion) to anybody. Whenever he had ordered a new coat for himself from the tailors, he himself finished up the work by sewing the piece of parchment into the material. (See text below).

Faith rests on two pillars – experiencing God and doing what is good

In Pascal's document we can still sense the inner excitement, the strong emotions. And then we discover these two mainstays which characterize not just the Christian faith alone but are integral to all world religions: And so – for one thing – there is this experiencing the Deity, *God*, this experience of depth and transcendence (the latter as derived from Latin, meaning

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"to rise above", i.e. to rise above the surface of everyday reality) while the other is its practice or application ... in terms of rules of conduct, commandments, laws and morality. And between these two there is something like a sway within the Christian communities, the sway between the *message* on the one hand and its implementation on the other, which characterizes the current climate in the parishes. But also where the individual's religious pathway is concerned, it is possible that the accent or focus is perhaps more on one side and - at other times – more on the other.

"In the year of Grace 1654, Monday 23rd November, Day of Saint Clement, Pope and Martyr, and others of the *Martyrology* (i.e. catalogue of martyrs). It is the Night of Vigil of Saint Chrysogonus (martyr) and others; between approx. half-past-ten in the evening until approx. half an hour past midnight".

Fire.

"God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob"

Not the God of the philosophers and the Learned.

Certitude, Certitude, Perception, Joy, Peace ...

The God of Jesus Christ ...

"Your God shall be my God."

Forgetting about the world and all the things in it - except for God ...

The only paths where He can be found are the ones taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul ...

"Righteous Father, unknown to the world, but known to me"

Joy, Joy, Joy, Tears of Joy.

I have parted with Him:

My God, wilt thou forsake me - (now)?

Pray to God that He won't abandon me forever.

"This is Life Eternal, that they may know Thee,

The true and only God and the one that Thou hast sent – Jesus Christ"

I have turned my back on him und run away.

I have denied, I have crucified Him ...

May I never again be estranged from Him

Man is protected only as long as he walks on the path taught in the Gospel.

May the denial of the Self be heartfelt and complete

May my submission to Jesus Christ and to my religious guide be complete

Short is the day of hardship on earth and forever joyful what lies ahead."

(Blaise Pascal, 1623 - 1662)

When we look at what Jesus had to say about *Joy*, then it becomes clear that we – nowadays – tend to be more interested in the *personal (individual) experience aspect* of our Christian faith, which does not mean that we think less of the *other* (i.e. the implementation aspect of it /translator's note).

The British author C.S. Lewis in his book "Letters from a senior to a junior Devil" confronts the reader with the Devil *Screwtape* giving instructions to his nephew and "junior" devil *Wormwood*. (In the book, God is named "The enemy").

"Don't you ever forget that we walk on the Enemy's territory whenever we are dealing with *pleasure* in a way which is healthy, normal and satisfying (to Man). I know that by *pleasure* we have overpowered the one or other human soul in the past. Be that as it may – **Joy is his invention** – not ours. He created it. Despite our far advanced research, we have not

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succeeded so far, to produce *one single, authentic piece of joy*. All we can do is to stimulate the humans to take in the pleasures created by the Enemy at times – or in a way, or to a degree – which He *does not allow*. And therefore, it is our goal to separate Man from what is the natural environment or home of whatever may be joy or joyful to him, pull him away from what is natural as far as possible to a location or degree where it has nothing more to do with its source, the Creator, with not an atom of joy left in it. And what's the trick behind it all? It's the production of an ever-growing desire **devoid** of all joy".

Joy, thus, is an invention of God. He wants to share His joy with us. Having circumscribed *Joy* as the resting state which follows upon fulfilment of our heart's desires, then this explains why God – within Himself – must be 'Joy in Perfection'. He lives while being His very own, his absolute Self. He is forever embedded and at rest in His Greatness and Perfection.

Joy – an invention of God

Because of that – in the daily Eucharist ceremony – there is one prayer in particular which I have become very much attached to. Whenever in preparing the chalice, by pouring into it water and wine, I pray: "Like the water merges with the wine creating the holy symbol, may this chalice unite us with the Godhood of Christ who adopted our human nature, making it his own." With this daily prayer, I place before God my own inner longing to participate in this joy which, after all, is part of His, God's very own nature.

Meanwhile, the one or other reader may have asked himself: "Well, but how does this agree with the Cross and the Love for the Cross? And what about suffering? How could I possibly block out the darker half of life which sometimes turns out as the bigger half even? Why ... there *are* those days which aren't in the least bit funny! There *are* hours of despair. There *are* those times of unfathomable sadness which tend to tear you downward – deeper and deeper. There *is* failure, there *is* limitation and all of this does make you suffer and ... there *is* loneliness.

If, however, we don't accept this dark side of life then we wouldn't be realists and would have to resort to drugs or sedatives so not to *see* what we don't want to be real. Such an attitude has nothing in common with being a *mature* Christian. Negating or ignoring reality (as it is) would mean *giving up control* in the face of reality. Now, there *are* Christians around who – having gone through a good share of grief and suffering – radiate this particular kind of joy which leaves us wondering in amazement. About St Francis of Assisi, an episode is known which tells us that amidst sorrow and distress he – Francis – was able to praise God for His love which had formed the bridge to the suffering Christ, thus linking him to the fate of the Master on the Cross. Whenever love unites with fortitude, then the process of coping, of overcoming can be experienced by the individual soul as one of *nearness* ... and of *joy*.

No matter what you go through – stay at ease

But before I begin presenting to you the exercises for the "advanced learner", I would like to ask you *one* question: Couldn't it be that with all our seriousness about life and living, we sometimes tend to look at our own life as some kind of a tragedy (i.e. by taking things too much to heart)?

I can remember that in our German classes in school we were confronted with "Antigone", the Greek tragedy. And I remember also that this divine "Must" which Antigone followed in the end, got me all shook up inwardly. And it turned out an important step forward in my search, trying to find my vocation. And it took me a long time to cut loose from this *pull* towards the tragic and to realize – deep inside of me – that Mount Olivet and Good Friday is

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in no way the last and final *secret* of Faith but what follows upon it is: *EASTER*. And so, with all our earnest, all our seriousness which we put into our vocational pursuit, we are free to develop a certain degree of *ease*. Not without purpose those words by Christ, spoken to his grown-up, over-anxious, over-responsible disciples:

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." When children trust their parents, then they will place before them all their big and little problems *and* ... all the bad and naughty things as well.

And so for us it is important not to get bogged down in sadness for too long, no matter what its cause ... be it by (a knowledge of) one's own iniquities, be it the painful awareness of one's limitations. These reasons for our sadness may become our stepping stone or springboard for catapulting ourselves right into the loving arms of our gracious Father-God. The sooner we manage this "jump" and the longer we can feel at home and secure in those arms, the more lasting and deep the experience of this joy, which is the knowledge that He has accepted us as His beloved children.

In 1934, Father Kentenich held a retreat (course of spiritual exercises) for priests, the motto being: "Perfect Joy of Living". Following Franz von Sales' explanations, he underlines that *sadness* can be linked to principally three main causes:

1. The devil
2. Man's melancholic temperament
3. Various calamities, blows of fate

In the following, I would like to present to you, dear reader, a few quotations from this retreat.

re1) – There is only One who could have a particular interest in seeing us sad ... it is *he*, the very manifestation of sadness ... it is the devil. And since he is this manifestation himself he can't bear to see others joyful and happy, and therefore he makes every effort to push man even deeper into the night of sadness. He *is* sadness personified. As we know: Joy is the state of man's manifold urges and drives come to rest ... no more striving forward for a while, knowing that something definitely good has been achieved. The highest and ultimate good *is* God. The devil, however, can never possess God. But – as it goes along with his devilish nature, this inner drive of his to be God-like and God himself, he can't help being ... this incorporated sadness. And that is where his never-ending effort stems from, i.e. to seize any opportunity to convince Man of the sadness of a life which is lived in God." (p. 115)

re2) – The melancholic temperament: Many of us know from experience that the melancholic person can be victim to his own faltering emotions ... to this constant sway between anxiety and uncertainty, to this ever-so-strong tendency to take everything (over-)serious, to become bogged down by his life's individual burdens and hardships. What is the way out? It would be to say: I say 'yes' to inner strife and helplessness, and - in placing it before God - I devote myself totally to Him; thus, by recognizing my littleness, I am all the more conscious of it. What may follow is the realization that sins – deep-rooted sins from the past – must not and need not be an everlasting source for sadness.

You may even take a deeper look by remembering what is expressed in the *mysterium iniquitatis* (i.e. the Mystery of Evil): (It is) the knowledge of the healing and sanctifying power *inherent* in the awareness process of guilt, of sin and of remorse. *Nothing* – nothing whatsoever shall keep our minds tied down in a prolonged state of sadness.

Also not, Gentlemen, our individual limits and limitations, our individual – *innate* – drive towards bustle and activity! Because this is nothing but another trick by the devil with which he likes to torment the striving individual. The devil presses Man to become dissatisfied with himself, in the sense of: All others are valuable and God's blessed children – *just not me*.

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How can it be that I am so lead-footed, so slow in my mind? Away with these thoughts! When I have my firm footing in God, then I have all reasons to be what I am and that even deeper. The reason for that is: I, too, am God's idea while embodied! God wanted me the way I am – with my limitations. That is why He loves me – me also. And therefore I must love myself with all my limitations, because – while I am trying to approach God and what his thoughts might be, my love for Him deepens and grows. Yes – and even if I have failed and made mistakes and find myself struggling with God ... does *He* mean me to remain focussed on my littleness, on my failures and sins for an extra long time? Holy men – especially Franz von Sales – advise us not to. So – once again – don't dwell on those paralyzing memories of sin and wrong for an excessive period of time! *Instead* – try also to *see* what's positive: Join up with God – wholeheartedly and joyfully! The more often I do this with a positive attitude, the more effectively will it divert my soul from everything which *is not - God*.

re3) – And yet we know one thing from experience: Sacrifice and sorrow are powerful and manifold companions in our lives, and while we are on earth we often cannot escape from affliction – in one way or other. And whenever suffering has caught up with us and demanded its toll in terms of sadness – perhaps beyond all measure and wild – then we should nevertheless follow the Apostle's command, get to work on our *immunization status* – so to speak - and learn something more about the art of *transforming* ... then we must learn to change sorrow, suffering and sadness into joy – real joy. There are two ways, obviously, to give it a try.

The first way or option, dear listeners, should be the farthest and deepest-going one – one to be focussed on repeatedly, day after day, over and over again. The path or option which I call *deepest*, is the 'Magic key called Love'. And it will happen in no time at all that sorrow and sadness give way to joy! Yes ... for Love even sadness can become an object of joy – provided that it is love in its highest possible form. "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." (Comp. John 8, 29) and "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." (See John 4, 34). But that's how it is, obviously: Spiritually, our lives' transformation processes originate in the love we have for God – a love at the same time deep-rooted and heaven-bound." (p. 119f)

Dear readers, maybe when learning about joy's three "enemies" and about the different ways to make us stronger for the fight, it reminded you of the one or other experience you went through yourself? And yet, Father Kentenich in his Course of Spiritual Exercises offered another helpful differentiation, when talking about joy connected with Sundays as compared to joy linked with workdays. Joy can be twofold. Joy can be felt – lived – different on workdays and again different on Sundays. *Sunday's joy* is deep-felt nourishment on an emotional level, deep-going restfulness in God, mind and soul being at peace with the Divine.

Somewhat different is what he called *workday's joy*, i.e. the quiet and stable consciousness of following God's wish and will in a restful manner. This kind of joy may be experienced, therefore, in a state of humble devotion and dedication in doing God's will and this – in turn – will be accompanied by restful harmony and peace of mind."

Maybe this differentiation can be of help whenever we tend to put ourselves under pressure – unnecessarily – in our effort to appear good-humoured all the time. Workday's joy – a term which suggests that this state is experienced more frequently – may be associated with six days – out of seven. But it is only one day per week that is connected to the other type, i.e. Sunday's joy. That's the only way for us to bear what the Apostle Paul invites us to do in his letter to the Philippians (4,4): "Rejoice in the Lord *always*. I will say it again: Rejoice!"*

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In other words: The result of one's innermost struggling and striving and longing need not be limited to Sunday's joy alone.

(* Emphasis added / translator's note)

Keeping a "Joys diary" (a synonym could be "My daisies diary")

One word which we could connect with Sunday's Joy is the word "luck". Hermann Hesse writes: Among all the words, the speaker has his favourites and others, the use of which feels strange ... there are words preferred and words avoided, those used every day, those used a thousand times without fear of wearing them out, and – there are those for "special occasions" which – no matter how beloved – will be spoken or written with great prudence and care ... the rarity and selectivity of use matched in appreciation and awareness of the festive character, environment, etc. For me, *luck* is one of those words (Hermann Hesse – *Über das Glück*, (What luck is) p. 10f).

Dear reader, I would like to ask you, however, to write down such moments, just as Blaise Pascal did. No need, of course, to sew them up in the material of your clothing. It is quite sufficient to return to the habit of the good old diary. Somebody I know who is confronted with plenty of suffering and sorrow due to his job, told me that almost every evening he takes the time to *set* his 'pearl of the day' (that's how he named it). The 'pearl of the day' – that were the big and small daily joys and pleasures, the thankfulness of the patients, the sun breaking forth after a rain shower, a rose coming into bloom, a child laughing. When we are aware – attentively aware – of these little sources of joy then we will find it much easier also to praise God in the face of whatever grief and hardship ... *and to thank him* ... because of the wealth of gifts He has bestowed on us.

No enjoyment without leisure

There is another source of disturbance that should be mentioned in this context. It is the hectic bustle, the *over-activity*. Enjoyment calls for a certain measure of feeling 'at ease'. Taking time, so that a feel of something positive is given space to develop within my soul - *that is definitely something* that wants practicing – again. I was really amazed when I came across the following passage in a text written by Hermann Hesse in 1899:

"Large sections of the people nowadays spend their lifetime in gloomy hollowness – devoid of any joy and love. Finer souls experience our uncreative styles of living as oppressive and hurtful, causing them to withdraw into seclusion. I mean that it is joy which we are lacking. ... It is the momentum and buoyancy of life uplifted, it is the idea of life as something joyful, a feast to celebrate ... and isn't it that what it is? What we find so attractive about the time of the Renaissance? - The over-emphasis we put on *time*, on *haste* as the main driving force in our present-day lives ... all this, doubtlessly, is the greatest enemy of joy. Sadly enough, this hectic and speed of modern life has long taken possession of the little spare time that is left. What follows is that our way of enjoying something is filled with the same nervousness almost, the same wear and tear as our workday. "As much as possible and as fast as possible" ... that's the motto. As a result, more and more pleasure at the cost of less and less joy." (p.25f)

What would Hermann Hesse say today if he could see us rushing through our lives, I wonder. Sure it would help us to look at the times set aside for prayer as an *opportunity* to slow down, to reduce the fastness from our day's agenda. As a result, our soul could catch up with us and be given the chance to respond in a commensurate manner. Then we will become receptive to the joy which God has in store for us. Today's meditation was based on

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a word by the Master Jesus as we find it written in St. John's Gospel: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Jesus then wants us to be joyful and rejoicing – already here on earth and not postpone our happiness to future days in heaven. He indicates, however, that this ability to experience joy is subject to a process of growth. Because – *perfect (or complete) joy* is the fruit of fortitude, to be understood as the fruit of an ongoing mental immunisation process against all that's negative. It requires a certain 'discipline of the heart' in the sense of asking oneself: What's the constant focus of my thoughts and feelings? Is it the positive or is it the negative?

It is a strange interaction between getting active oneself and at the same time being receptive and open for God's gifts. I wish for you – and I pray for you – that you may begin to feel familiar and at home in whatever constitutes your "workday's joys" while developing an ever-growing awareness for "Sunday's joys" as God's gift to you ... to be accepted and enjoyed with an attentive and wide-awake heart.

P. Elmar Busse

(Ins Englische übersetzt von Katharina M.)