

Reflection for Laetare Sunday- 4th Sunday of Lent

March 27, 2022

First Reading: [Joshua 5:9a, 10-12](#)

Psalm: [34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7](#)

Second Reading: [2nd Corinthians 5:17-21](#)

Gospel: [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

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“Hey, Sister, do you know how to spell joy?”

Some 60 years ago one of my exuberant second graders greeted me one Monday morning with that question. Assuming this was more than a spelling test I said, “*Tell me, Hugh, how do you spell joy?*” Well, says he, “*J stands for Jesus, y stands for you and o? That’s like zero. It means nothing. So, when nothing comes between you and Jesus, you have Joy!*” Some lessons are so profoundly simple they can never be forgotten, but they can take a life time to really learn and live.

This fourth Sunday of lent, known as Laetare or Rejoice Sunday reminds me of that Monday morning lesson, and the place of joy in bringing about redemption!

In today’s world, we may be hard pressed to find much to be joyful about and plenty that blocks it out. Our world is starving, is dying, from a lack of joy. Could that be our new ministry- finding joy and bringing joy to all we encounter? That asks us to be the change we wish to see in the world. Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel* that, “*The identity card of the Christian is his/her joy, the joy of the Gospel, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of the hope that Jesus is waiting for us.*” This joy is not an emotion, it’s sharing in the very life of Jesus which had both joy and plenty of pain. The heart of flesh that God promised (*Ezek. 36*) to give us can feel both, very acutely. We all know people whose suffering has softened their heart, making it more spacious and gracious, able to receive and give more joy than ever imagined, evidence that joy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and can live in the midst of suffering.

Turning to today’s Gospel, the younger son had an idea, quite common today, that joy was out there, but just beyond his grasp, and having a lot of “*stuff*” would bring him the joy and freedom he was seeking. When he finally hit bottom, he was able to see with new eyes, eyes that saw clearer, more broadly and very much deeper. He came back to the source of his true joy, his father.

On this fourth Sunday in lent I can’t help but also think of the 4th goal of the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, the *Adoption of a simple life-style* and its connection to joy. You may want to check out [Laudato Si’ Lent](#) at Ignatian Solidarity Network on Sunday. Like the younger son, who thought “*stuff*” would bring him joy, the older son was so blinded by his grudges and hurts that joy evaded him; he couldn’t rejoice in the joy of others. Both sons had to learn that deep down joy is found in loving relationships.

The middle of lent is a good time to ask, “*Am I travelling with a lot of baggage that comes between Jesus and me and prevents me from knowing the joy of the Gospel, the joy of loving relationships? Am I mindful that pain and suffering do not rule out joy, indeed, they are the very essence of the Paschal mystery?*”

As St. Paul tells the Corinthians, we are “*ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.*” Who then is the God we are revealing? A God of abundance, always willing the fullness of life and joy, or . . .? Perhaps, this week we might consider singing, either out loud or in our head, the Quaker song “*How Can I Keep from Singing?*”