

Joyful Gospel Living - June 2023

Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned Your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with You. I need You. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into Your redeeming embrace.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3)

What a wonderful week this has been, starting with the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ and continuing into the joyful celebrations of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Truly, our liturgical observances bring great joy to our hearts and draw us ever closer into the wondrous mystery of God’s love.



Last month, a cantor at our parish asked me to be the accompanist at our Saturday vigil Mass. Even though I was already scheduled for the 7:30 AM Sunday Mass, I accepted his request. This Mass is usually very crowded, so I was not surprised when a young family came to sit in the very first pew closest to the piano. As we waited for the liturgy to begin, I noticed that the parents were trying to settle down their approximately three-year old daughter. As soon as the lector made the announcements and the cantor announced the gathering hymn, I began to play the piano, and the little girl immediately turned her attention to the piano and the music. However, once the readings started, so did the fidgeting. It was hard not to smile as I remembered my own four children doing this same thing so many years ago in church.

After the second reading, I started to play the introduction to the Celtic Alleluia. Again, the little girl was transfixed by the sacred music, standing upright in the pew as she gripped its edge with determination. As the cantor began to sing the first “Alleluia,” so did the little girl—with a loud voice and great joy. It seemed as though everyone in church captured the joy that this little one was putting into her “Alleluia.” When it was time for the assembly to repeat the “Alleluia,” voices resonated more than usual. I will never forget that moment of joy and the purity of heart of that little girl.

In March, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the election of Pope Francis as the head of Christ’s Church. In his first year as pontiff, he released the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (June 29, 2013) and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013). As Secular Franciscans who are called to go from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel, the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* can inspire us, especially during this month when the Secular Franciscan Order observes the 45th anniversary of the approval of our Rule by St. Pope Paul VI (June 24, 1978).

In the introduction to the exhortation, Pope Francis writes to bishops, clergy, consecrated persons, and the lay faithful: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to **a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ**, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’¹ The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that He is already there, waiting for us with open arms.”

How does the Gospel bring us joy? The invitation to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ should be very familiar to us: *Seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in our brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity, finding our inspiration and pattern in the eucharistic life* (OFS Rule, 5). During the course of every day, we will encounter little children singing an “Alleluia” of praise, lonely people waiting for a kind greeting, angry people who may find peace through us, suffering people in need of basic necessities, and people on the margins just waiting to be welcomed. Each of these encounters is our invitation to meet Christ—with renewed joy.

Pax et Bonum!

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¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* (9 May 1975), 22: AAS 67 (1975), 297.