

Joy!

Video of the Dalai Lama laughing

One of the ways that I know there is a long way ahead of me on the spiritual path is when I see holy men like the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu laugh. These are people who have experienced great suffering both personally and as part of an oppressed people. Yet they can laugh and laugh.

It seems that joy is the mark of a child, and also of a spiritual master. It is the mark of one who is deeply connected to the source of life. In the first lesson we heard:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

Why? because God is coming. This passage is one of the beautiful prophecies that came during the end of the Babylonian exile. The nation had been overrun by the Babylonians and most of the people exiled into other countries with many of the leaders taken to Babylon. There they continued to worship the God they knew, and held the faith that they would return to the Holy Land.

It is as true today as it was then. God is coming. God comes. We often say in our Eucharistic liturgy, ***Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.*** This is our understanding of the great cosmic story and it is also our understanding of how our God works in our lives.

Christ has died and has conquered death, the wilderness is glad. Christ is Risen and brought us new life, the desert rejoices and sings. Christ will come again and like the crocus the dry land will rejoice with singing and dancing.

I think that joy may come as the result of our truly knowing the truth of these words. Most of us have moments of joy in our lives – the rainbow that astonishes, the small child who laughs, the unexpected phone call –

many things can give us joy. But perhaps that deep joy which sustains and rumbles and bursts out in the giggles of holy men and women. Perhaps that joy needs cultivating.

At the Abundance Shop meeting this week, Deb asked all the volunteers to say something nice about the person on their left. I'm sure you all know what a challenge that can be. So the lady who had to say something nice about me said she liked when I smiled because most of the time I look so serious. In the last few weeks I have been pretty task focused and several of you have commented that I seem stressed. I apologize for times when I may have been less present or less welcoming than I want to be. It has been a reminder that when I am juggling too many projects or have over-booked myself that I am not as joyful as I would like to be. For me, cultivating joy means allowing more time in my agenda so that I can be more present to each person. For one of the things that gives me joy is being with each of you and enjoying your company and the grace of Christ shining through you.

I wonder what cultivating joy means for you?

Here is Archbishop Tutu.

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So share the joy. You don't need to make a video but please turn to someone near you. What has given you joy recently and how can you cultivate joy in your life?

Would anyone like to share?

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I wonder if there's a link between joy and gratitude? This morning I was thinking about this when I heard the first bird of the morning sing outside the window. It gave me joy and my heart swelled and I was grateful for the bird and for the song. I wonder whether the gratitude came before the joy or the joy before the gratitude? I can't tell.

But I do know that there are different ways to look at something. I look at the moon and it can just be the moon, or it can be a cause of worship – last night it rose in the north east and after the evening service it was quite big and lightly eaten on the top left – this morning it was much higher in the sky, shining in my skylight and much smaller. I gave

thanks for the moon. I was grateful. It gave me joy. I worshiped God the Creator.

Here's another quotation probably from just after the time of the Babylonian exile, this time from Psalm 126,

“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion
then we were like those who dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter
and our tongue with shouts of joy”

Poet Nan Merrill paraphrases it like this:

When the Divine Lover enters the human heart,
all yearnings are fulfilled!
Then will our mouths ring forth with laughter, and
our tongues with shouts of joy!

Let me be very clear. I am NOT saying that it is somehow wrong to grieve or to feel sadness. There is much sadness in our world and it is important for us to acknowledge that. But there is also great Joy. Often the glass really is half full. It is up to you how you see it.

I am choosing today to see it full and getting fuller. I hope that you will join me. That like Mary the mother of God, we will have the courage to allow the Divine Lover to enter our hearts and will give ourselves utterly to the work of the Spirit. Then as Merrill says

all yearnings are fulfilled!
Then will our mouths ring forth with laughter, and
our tongues with shouts of joy!

Let's give one of the holy men the last laugh...

Tutu laughing...

