

INTRODUCTION

1 *Those who have a true encounter with Christ find their lives filled with happiness. This is a deep happiness that brings inner emptiness to an end because these Christians are set free from selfishness. They are saved. I want to encourage everyone who experiences this to spread the word, beginning a new chapter in the history of the Church.*

I. DEEP HAPPINESS THAT IS SHARED WITH OTHERS

2 In today's world, we are subject to a blizzard of temptations that lead us away from this authentic happiness. Whenever we become selfish, seeking pleasure and profit only for ourselves, we can no longer hear God's voice. Many baptized Christians are led away from faith by this. They become resentful, angry, and listless. God does not want this for us.

3 So I now invite all Christians throughout the world to pause at this very moment in their lives and allow their hearts to be touched by Christ. Be renewed! Do this daily. I mean this invitation for everyone, and no one should think they are not invited. If you take the risk of giving yourself, heart and soul, to Christ, he will respond each and every time. He never

disappoints. His arms are open. Don't ever stop returning to Christ with your whole heart. Now is the time.

Group or personal process

Discuss: What is your experience of “giving your heart to Christ”? How and when do you do that?

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Action: Pass a cross or other sacred object around the group, person to person. As it comes to each, pray aloud or pray quietly, asking for the grace to offer yourself wholeheartedly to Christ.

4 Throughout human history, God has promised that we would find happiness in the Messiah. The prophets spoke eloquently about this. “God ... will rejoice over you with gladness,” Zephaniah wrote. “He will renew you in his love” (3:17). What a fantastic promise! What tender, parental love this is!

5 Likewise, in the Gospels we read time and again that knowing Christ leads to happiness. Jesus himself promised it. I am teaching you about self-giving love, he said, so that your own happiness may be complete and full. “I have said these things to you,” he said in John 15:11, “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

6 Some Christians live like it's always Lent! They forget about Easter. I do realize that some people are suffering greatly and happiness seems far away for them. But even in these cases, it is possible to live with self-giving love that leads to happiness.

7 Not everything we need and want will ever be provided to us. We should not think that happiness will happen only when everything is in place and “correct” in our lives. In part, this is because our culture is good

at providing fleeting experiences of pleasure, but is not very able to help people be really happy. Nonetheless, I have seen many people, even in the midst of challenging life situations, keep a simple faith alive and allow God to reveal himself. Remember, our faith leads to an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, and that can happen in any circumstance.

8 Only the encounter with Christ leads us away from selfishness and toward self-giving. Only when we imitate Christ and empty ourselves can we know true happiness. And if we have experienced this ourselves, how can we help but tell others about it? This is the inspiration for what I want to tell you in this letter.

Group or personal process

Discuss: How do you hone and refine the art of dying to yourself through self-giving love in your life? To whom are you called to show this love, and how do you do that concretely? How does the practice of self-emptying lead to happiness for you?

II. HAPPINESS GROWS WHEN WE SHARE OUR FAITH

9 Everyone who has experienced Christ in this personal way reaches out to tell others about it and leads them to Christ as well. In this way, the good around us grows ever larger.

10 When I invite you to become part of this, I'm offering you authentic happiness in your own life. Your life has meaning only insofar as you give it away. This is your true purpose and destiny. I ask you to speak about your faith with great joy!

11 The message that we can be freed from selfishness is not itself new,

but how we announce it can be very fresh and invigorating. In our culture today, it may sound very new, indeed.

12 And even though we are going to have to sacrifice ourselves for this work, we must also realize that, first and foremost, it is Christ acting through us. We ourselves are loved first by God; it is God's love that we offer to others. God asks us to give up everything for him, but at the same time, God gives everything to us.

13 The work of helping people see how to live in Christ flows from our own memory of having been shown this way ourselves. Remember when it happened to you, that first encounter with Christ? The encounter that really moved your own heart? When you speak to others of this, you speak from that wonderful memory.

Group or personal process:

Action: Create a list of those whom you feel would benefit from hearing the call to follow Jesus, imitating his own self-giving love. Be specific on this list and avoid listing large groups. Try to think about people who live near you, and you may decide to place your own name on this list if you want.

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Private prayer: Speak to Jesus Christ in prayer, accepting his grace and power to be one of those who tells others about the happiness of living with this love.

III. SPEAKING OF FAITH IN OUR DAY AND AGE

14 I write this today on behalf of the whole Church, represented by a group of bishops who met to discuss this in October 2012. They pointed out that speaking of faith like this happens in three principal groups.

15 First, there is the group whom we usually see at worship, even those we don't see there very often. Second, there is that group of people who are away from the Church pretty much completely. And third are those who have not yet met or known about Christ. Many of these latter ones are quietly seeking God in their own way. They yearn for faith. We want to attract them to us by living our own faith convincingly. In this regard, we want to develop a "missionary pastoral ministry" in the Church.

16 These bishops asked me to write this appeal. I have sought advice from many, and I have my own views as well. There are many issues involved, and I can't address them all. I also don't think the pope has the only voice speaking about this; local bishops and others also have a voice.

17 I plan to present some guidelines and write about how the Church can be reformed in doing missionary outreach, certain temptations that pastoral leaders face, how it is that the whole Church must do this work, the role of the homily, how to include the poor in society, our desire for peace and dialogue, and the spirituality that motivates us to do this work.

18 I am writing this to encourage you to invite people and welcome them in God's name by every activity in your life.