

## The Secret of Contentment (28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

### Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20—The Secret of Joy

[<sup>11</sup> Not that I complain of want; for *I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.*] <sup>12</sup> *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.* <sup>13</sup> *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.* <sup>14</sup> Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [<sup>15</sup> And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; <sup>16</sup> for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.] <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:11-20)

1. Secret: Paul has learned the “secret” (Greek *mueō*) of how “to be content”—no matter what happens (Phil 4:11)
2. Humiliation: “I know how to be abased” (Greek *tapeinousthai*) (Phil 4:12)
3. Exaltation: “I know how to abound” (Greek *perisseuein*) (Phil 4:12)
4. Christ: “I can do all things *in him* who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13)

### The Living Tradition

Ignatius of Loyola: Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created... Therefore, we must make ourselves *indifferent* to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. *Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life...* Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created. (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 23, First Principle and Foundation; trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J.)

John Chrysostom: But since boasting might seem to have a place here, see how quickly he checks up, and says, “I can do all things in Christ that strengtheneth me.” The success is not mine own, but His who has given me strength. (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians* 15, in *NPNFI* 13.250)

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection (28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. According Paul, what is the “secret” to being content, “in whatever state” we find ourselves?

---

---

---

## For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Mark J. Edwards, ed. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).
3. Dennis Hamm, S.J., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).