

SHORT WRITINGS FROM TAIZÉ
14

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Pleasure,
Happiness, Joy

Introduction

Pleasure, Happiness, Joy. These three themes are clearly linked to each other. In part, they are the same thing. They are perhaps three degrees of increasing intensity, but at the same time each one has a different accent. Pleasure, on the whole, seems very much connected to circumstances: we feel that it is partial, occasional, transitory. It is also very immediate, and belongs mainly to life on earth. Happiness seems less connected to particular circumstances or occasions: it is more lasting, more ample, deeper; we feel that it is an inner state, a harmony with oneself and with existence.

We could say the same of joy, but with a sense that is more spiritual, inexpressible, and mysterious, since joy has to do with the fundamental mystery that we are in ourselves. It is shot through with energy, intensity, a thrill of wonder.

So each one has a different accent. But what characterises all three of them is that they have to be received or welcomed. We do not somehow fabricate them by ourselves. This is particularly true in the case of joy. Yet on the other hand, there is nothing passive about welcoming them: if we simply waited for them as a consumer product to which we had a right, nothing would happen. Receiving them means causing them to exist actively within us, choosing them again and again, cultivating them, tending them as one tends a fire. They are not exterior to us like objects: no, it is we who take pleasure, it is we who are warm with happiness, it is we who rejoice – in other words it is we who discover joy and who give it existence and expression within us and around us.

It can happen that education or a certain moral, austere atmosphere may lead us to emphasize the differences between these three themes. Even without going so far as to denigrate or distrust pleasure, we sometimes keep it at a distance, or at least at a distance from the more spiritual part of our lives, considering it something superfluous. As for happiness, it has sometimes been set in opposition to joy as an attitude that is necessarily selfish or egocentric. Here the influence of the eighteenth century

German philosopher Kant is clear. Kant wanted to keep morality free from all eudaimonism – from all searching for pleasure and happiness – and so he set its foundations entirely in objective reason, as a law that is viable for everyone.

In a Christian or spiritual perspective of this kind, joy would be the only one of the three to be accepted as a truly human and spiritual value. And it is true, joy is deeply linked to gratitude, to thankfulness, and to praise, which shows how eminently unselfish it is. But this is not a reason to place it in opposition to happiness, if one remembers how often the word “happy” or “blessed” is used in the Old Testament, not to mention the Beatitudes and the Gospel. It is true, the Beatitudes are paradoxical, especially in their primitive formulation in Saint Luke (chapter 6:20ff). They could be summarized: happy are the unhappy! Not because there is anything happy about unhappiness, but because in the person of Jesus who proclaims them, the deliverance of God’s Kingdom is already at hand. Jesus is not Kant! He does not mistrust the hope and desire for happiness that is present in humanity. St Matthew’s formulation (5:2ff), behind which lie some years of Christian experience, expresses a wisdom to be lived out in this happiness. Nevertheless, the paradox remains: joy is certainly a reality that exists, but it is below the horizon of the future in God; a reality that is indeed already active since Christ’s first coming, but which is to be expected in fullness only with his coming again at the end of time.

The following pages aim, while taking account of the differences, to show that the three themes can be stages that follow on from each other. It is not easy to make clear distinctions between them, and what can be said of one can, by and large, be said of the others. But what is most important is to become aware of an interchange that is necessary between pleasure and happiness, and between happiness and joy, as between joy or happiness and pleasure. Without this, they can be neither true, nor healthy, nor even intense.

Pleasure

Perhaps we should begin with the kernel of the problem: the impression, which we can keep from childhood, that there is an opposition between duty, effort, and obedience on the one side and pleasure on the other. We had to do our homework or household chores before going out to play. So are we in fact obliged to choose once and for all between pleasure and being serious? It is this idea itself that is really infantile. It may be necessary at a period of our development in which our personality is still at an early stage of growth, when it is still dominated by affectivity: a period of early training. But this opposition is only accidental, and it is something to be got over as soon as possible (even though in a sense we never entirely leave our childhood!) Moreover, it is well known that good methods of education aim to provoke interest and enthusiasm

rather than imposing external obligations. Certainly, in life not everything is a game, and not everything is pleasure. But what if, as far as possible, as a challenge, we made our existence itself into a sort of game? What if we became enlightened teachers for ourselves, so as to make all opposition between duty and pleasure disappear?

It cannot be denied that pleasure plays a considerable role in the never-ending development of a human personality: a role that builds it up and gives it a fundamental structure. Pleasure initiates and sustains projects, progress, and effort in every domain.

This search for pleasure was heavily underlined by Freud, but it was already recognized in Greek and Roman philosophy, especially by Aristotle, and by the Church Fathers and in the Middle Ages. Saint Thomas Aquinas devotes an entire treatise of his *Summa* to pleasure. Moreover, pleasure and will, which we often regard as being in tension, should both in fact be considered as effects of one single essential reality: desire. We are ourselves desire, a desire that responds to another primary and Mysterious Desire that calls us into existence. This is true of everyone, even if not everyone can see God the Creator in it. We are desire to be, desire to be more and more, desire to succeed, desire to grow, to last, to count in the eyes of others, desire to be happy. Pleasure, then, is when this desire is, at least partly, fulfilled. And will – we shall come back to this – means being able to put one's desire on hold, either

so that it remains a desire without being destroyed, or in order to attain another, greater, more desirable desire.

So desire, from the very beginnings of our life, is constitutive of our existence, even in its most rudimentary form. First of all, the body needs to satisfy its most immediate needs: eating, sleeping, resting in someone's arms; then moving, walking, touching and pulling down all kinds of objects, discovering the world around us. Pleasure is situated at the margins of the world as our senses perceive it, and at the margins of our relationship to ourselves. It is essentially affective; it is where things touch us. There is the pleasure of the body; but the body is not only physical; it is also a symbol of our inwardness, and we reach our inner being starting from our experience of the body. This is highlighted strongly by modern psychology, and it follows from this that even the most bodily of pleasures affects the whole of our being and reaches out into our imagination.

We have recognized above that in pleasure there is an inner harmony between oneself and one's own nature. Now, our nature does not consist just in being immersed in ourselves: it consists in coming out of ourselves; it implies transcendence, a search for freedom, for originality, a need for meaning – that is, dynamism and direction. All of this takes form as we become beings of speech: speech is the organizing force between the body, the psyche, and the spiritual. Pleasure, linked to what is most instinctive, most immediate in life, is also linked

to what is less immediate, more challenging: going beyond oneself. So it is also experienced as a thirst to know. Pleasure, at first emotional, a fundamental desire to live, is also expressed in a quest for knowledge. And here the intelligence comes into play. If knowledge is sought at first to increase sources of pleasure, later it can become more disinterested. And this development requires will, a subject that was touched on above and which now needs to be addressed.

As we grow in knowledge and experience, we are confronted with unavoidable choices. This is true even as little children. A pleasure at a certain distance requires us to renounce another pleasure nearer at hand: we have to make an effort to attain it. It is still a kind of game, but it is a little challenging. In order to get to the pot of jam, we have first to drag a chair in front of the cupboard, maybe put a book on the chair, and risk falling down, rather than just sit there sucking our thumb.

So human beings have the capacity to put off our desires, to take a long-term perspective and to organize ourselves by means of initiatives and renunciations, all of which goes together with progress in mastering one's gestures and one's thinking. To see further ahead, to take measures to get there, to make decisions, to take action in the name of a conviction: all this is will. So will is linked to pleasure as a friend and not as an enemy. We should not confuse will with a tense voluntarism: it is at the service of freedom.

All this shows how the intelligence and the will are related to desire, which itself is primarily felt in the emotions. So pleasure implies that these three dimensions act in close union. Without the will, as presented above, in its capacity to make decisions and to carry out the decisions with conviction, our being sinks into itself, and then there is no possibility for pleasure. And without the intelligence and without speech that gives it form, our being gets lost in subjectivity, and pleasure soon dries up. But it is our affectivity, as our essential link with ourselves, that actually feels pleasure. We should be careful not to disparage it, and not to isolate it. For it is by plunging back into it that our will really becomes our own, and not a sort of exterior structure. Similarly, it is by plunging back into our affectivity that our intelligence avoids becoming a mere abstract knowledge.

So, a dialogue needs to grow up between these dimensions that make us up: affectivity, intelligence, and will (in the sense of our affectivity setting itself a goal, a scale of values). When affectivity is gently invited by will and intelligence to enter into their dancing movement, it will sow pleasure all around and help them wonderfully in their effort. As we have seen, it is easier to learn, to will, and to make an effort with the help of pleasure than by lashing oneself brutally.

Pleasure and Reality

Turning towards the principle of reality means not remaining in a kind of unreal idealism. We can be tempted to mistake our desires for reality, to deny the facts, to refuse to see things as they are, to imagine them as it suits us. And in that case, pleasure simply leads us to illusion, and to its consequence, disillusionment.

What do we mean by reality? First, the reality of others, of happenings, of things. From childhood, we have to learn that the world of people and things does not exist just for our sake, and does not revolve around our convenience. From the fusional relationship of the infant with its mother and everything around it, it is necessary to move on to a relationship of otherness. If I consider that pleasure is when everything is arranged as I please, I run the serious risk of harvesting nothing but dissatisfaction. In a novel by Giono (*Les deux cavaliers de l'orage*), two women try to predict the future by pouring molten lead into water. One of them says to the other "And what if it doesn't say what you want?", and she replies: "Then I'll have to want what it says." In the same sense, Saint Augustine quotes from the Latin comic writer Terence: "Since you cannot do what you desire, desire what you can do." So in many cases, the solution is to make the best of reality and to find pleasure in it: or at least to desire to do so rather than just to give up.

Secondly, reality means the fact that pleasure exists in the plural: not just pleasure but pleasures.

And pleasures are partial, but they tend towards a certain happiness. But if one pleasure becomes all my happiness, if it absorbs my entire capacity to desire, it will make me miss out on myself. A newspaper report about an athlete mentions that his entire passion is to jump as far as possible. But if that were really all the desire he had, he would hardly be a human being at all. Desire must always be larger than pleasure, and stay open to something greater than itself. In this, common sense will be enough to keep us from a bulimia, a gluttony in which pleasure destroys itself by becoming its own end (in both senses of the word.) The hen that laid the golden eggs is not an empty myth: it is good to make the most of the eggs, but without killing the hen; to enjoy pleasures without drying up the source of pleasures.

This brings us to the third aspect of reality as it concerns pleasure. The feeling of fullness that goes with a pleasure is only there as a bonus. This means that to seek pleasure for pleasure's sake, as an end in itself, is to miss it. It can only be sought indirectly. This is true in all domains of existence: in sport, in learning the violin, in making a collection.... If we did such things uniquely in view of pleasure, we would soon not find any pleasure in them at all. In order for an activity to bring pleasure, we have to be able to do it with a certain skill and with a certain creativity, a bit of self-realisation. And this implies a quest for quality, a concern for progress. This is true to such an extent that in fact pleasure

is always to be found a little to one side of or a little beyond the place where we thought it was. For example, if we take up the violin for pleasure, and pleasure is really our only aim, we will soon be tired of it, because in fact pleasure is to be found in playing as well as possible, in getting over difficulties, in aiming for a certain quality that is by definition always a little beyond the point at which we have actually arrived. A connoisseur of wine whose only aim was to down as many as possible would very soon have no pleasure and be no connoisseur: he needs to taste, to make comparisons, to talk about it. There is a whole culture around wine-tasting that makes it a qualitative pleasure. It is the same in every domain.

Because we are called to grow, to mature, to see further than just ourselves in the present instant, it is essential to the truth of our humanity to desire pleasure as an echo, as a bonus, and not as the goal. Everyone can recognize this, not only Christians: we are not our own source nor our own goal. Life is given to us, it is there to be received and offered in the exchange of an agreement, a covenant. Our past reaches back far before our birth, and our future stretches out infinitely further than our death. This is the perspective within which pleasure is framed.

Pleasure and Happiness

Now we are ready to look at the connection between pleasure and happiness. It is by starting from our varied experiences of pleasure that we can have an idea of what happiness is and can aspire to it with the intuition that happiness constitutes an inner experience that is deeper and above all more all-encompassing, more stable, less immediate, less dependant on circumstances. For, more than pleasures, happiness should also be revealed to us by the meaning we see in our life – a meaning, as we have seen, that comes from beyond myself and looks beyond myself, which determines my future. This meaning, and the happiness that goes with it, is a matter of faith, of Christian faith for example, or simply of human faith (for all of us have some kind of faith): trust, the sense of a meaning to be recognized and to be given to existence, an ideal to be striven for. Happiness will one day mean to achieve this ideal, and happiness now means to move towards it and, in part, to attain it. If this faith is Christian, it will be conscious that happiness in fullness consists in being like Jesus on Easter morning, in knowing oneself welcomed by him into a life that will never cease to grow and to deepen in harmony with oneself, with others, with the world. A life that is reconciled, in communion with the Father of Jesus and with his brothers and sisters in humanity. We should not envisage this as a limitless duration in which nothing at all happens: that would be pure boredom! We should imagine rather a moment of full-

ness, but a moment that does not come to an end, and instant in which God never ceases to come towards us in inexhaustible newness.

But if happiness is on the plane of faith, how can we avoid it becoming an abstract experience? How are we to enjoy God? For, as a Cistercian author of the twelfth century put it, “in order to please God, it is necessary to enjoy God”. We must, that is, find our pleasure in God. How is our affectivity to find pleasure in waiting for Christ and in imagining his Kingdom, in rejoicing in it in advance? Only by bringing into play, to the greatest possible extent, our most immediate and elementary experience of the pleasure of life. This is what gives force and reality to the happiness we are expecting. In this way, pleasure has an irreplaceable symbolic role to play. This is clearly how God intends things to be, if we think of the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the sacrament of happiness and the feast of the Kingdom: nothing could be more spiritual. But, having this as its aim, it takes the form of a meal, with everything that this necessarily implies of the pleasure of eating and drinking, of bodily well-being, even if the meal is stylized and reduced to the bare essentials. The only condition is that there is something to eat and drink, something with a taste.... Here the spiritual joins the most bodily in us, and this is where it draws its zest.

This is the service that pleasure undertakes for happiness: this symbolic role in which it provides images for happiness and a whole basis for it in our

most fundamental experience. And at the same time, pleasure is no longer able to remain an end in itself; it becomes meaningful as it becomes an expectation of something else, something almost inexpressible. And our discovery of happiness renders to pleasure the service of opening it to something beyond itself which does not pass away. There is more: the idea that I have of happiness will help me to decide which pleasure is good, desirable, or at least admissible, and which pleasure, even if legitimate in itself, is not so, because it is alien or even contradictory to this happiness, as a distraction, a flight, a replacement.

This is the way we are made. If our desire aims for a great happiness, a work of importance, or a worthwhile project, then we are not at the same time going to let ourselves be dispersed among a multitude of little pleasures, however legitimate. We have to accept that this implies a sort of modesty concerning pleasure. The wisdom of the ancients said about pleasure: *ne quid nimis*, “nothing overmuch”, because a certain frugality, a sense of moderation, leaves the mind more free for the task we want to do. Does this mean denying pleasure? No, but it means the decision to take pleasure in simple things, to limit one’s needs and one’s consumption, to appreciate to the full things that are so simple that we risk forgetting them: the scent of the air (when it is not polluted), the changing quality of the light, the fact of walking, the opportunity of seeing things from a new angle, eating an apple, a piece of bread....

To meet Christ, to be called by him, to choose God, to live in accordance with the Gospel – all this does not mean renouncing happiness, or even the taste for pleasure. The choice is not between God and happiness; the choice is to make of God and the covenant he proposes our prime pleasure, and the criterion of what our pleasures shall be. Saint Augustine assures us: “Everyone who turns to God sees their delights and pleasures change: they are not taken away, but transformed.” “There is no-one who does not love, but we need to know what we love. We are not called to stop loving, but choose what to love. And how are we to choose, if we have not ourselves first been chosen? For we do not love unless we have first been loved.”

So, the experience of pleasure brings to happiness its flesh, its concreteness, and in return, happiness requires pleasure to be able to choose, it reveals pleasure’s relativity. Now often pleasure is not happy to be relative: it tends to usurp the first place, to engage one’s whole desire, to take the place of happiness. This is the temptation of following the line of least resistance. The challenge then is to be lucid, to be in control, not in opposition to pleasure, but in order that pleasure may be real. For not it is not just any pleasure experienced in any way that can be a true symbol of the happiness I really aspire to.

From Happiness to Joy

How then are we to see joy? As a subjective experience, it is even more difficult to pin down than happiness. But objectively, from a Christian point of view, it is a gift of God and a human virtue, a strength that uplifts, an attitude that is a facet of love and a form of faith.

We have highlighted above that happiness in its fullness is ahead of us, as a future reality that we desire, even if we can already have a taste of it: an experience that is ours and also far more than ours. This longing protects our happiness here below from closing in on itself, from growing cloudy, from fleeing into illusion and from ending in disappointment; this longing protects it as a foretaste of what defies imagination, and what we must yet try to imagine. Otherwise, how are we to wonder at it, be ready for it, wait for it with an energetic vigilance?

I would like to suggest that joy can be considered as the capacity to live here and now in this happiness which is to come, to taste it already: joy as anticipation of itself, a conscious way seeing this happiness as more real than whatever is actually presented to our senses. Of course joy is coloured by circumstances, but, unlike pleasure, it is not fundamentally dependent on them. For a Christian, all this is not just theoretical, because we recognize the source of joy in the resurrection of the Lord and we are invited to receive it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit: “The fruits of the Spirit”, says St Paul, “are love, joy, peace, trustfulness, gentleness, self-control”

(Galatians 5:22). Let us dwell on the word: a fruit is something that needs to ripen. This fruit within us takes the form of an inner conviction and thus it becomes a power by which we are actively to give order and organization to our being. It is renewed in thanksgiving, admiration and praise, and it is realized in peace, in a fundamental serenity.

Happiness is, partly, our own responsibility, but it cannot really be the object of an command. “Be happy! Cheer up!”: it is more of a wish. But joy is something that St Paul clearly commands, as a requirement of the Gospel: “Rejoice in the Lord at all times” (Philippians 4:4). Not just when it springs up spontaneously, but “at all times”. And not by seeking reasons in ourselves, but “in the Lord”, that is in the clear awareness of our communion with the Risen Christ, and in the expectation of what he has promised.

In the Face of Displeasure, Haplessness, Suffering

The Apostle goes on in the following verses (4-7) to express the secret of this joy: instead of maintaining aggression or anxiety, transform them, change them into a calm and trusting and gentle strength. Easier said than done? But the Apostle reveals a secret about how to do this too: what is often needed is to let go of worries by entrusting them to God in

prayer. There is nothing magical about this, and it is not a question of self-hypnosis; entrusting things to God means first distancing oneself from them to a certain extent, putting them into perspective, and above all it means not augmenting them by infusing them with our desire to complain or to be pitied. That does not happen all at once, but prayer “without ceasing” perseveres. And it can become apparent that a worry can turn into an opportunity to experience, by trusting, a closer fellowship with the Lord, to welcome him more deeply into oneself, and, in communion with his suffering, to experience something of his victory. In this way, we can have the mysterious spiritual experience that God’s closeness and the strength of his promises are more real than anything that can happen to us. So there is a kind of joy even in the midst of anxiety. But there is nothing passive or automatic about it: it is to be welcomed and at the same time to be wanted.

There is another secret that St Paul mentions: this prayer is to be thankful. We have already alluded to this. Thanksgiving is powerful because it contributes to distancing us from our anxious ego in order to turn towards God, and because it has the audacity to anticipate God’s answer to our prayer, to anticipate God’s deliverance. Giving thanks in advance is a way of bringing about the future. And again, it is thankfulness that helps us to enter into God’s peace, which is beyond all we can imagine, and which “guards our hearts and minds.”

But anxiety is not the only difficulty. There is

everything that goes against what we wish, against the good that we were relying on and even against what we had asked for in prayer. What happens to joy then? Talking about pleasure above, we came across a similar question, to which the answer of a deep popular wisdom was “if you don’t have what you want, want what you have”. This reaction of healthiness and realism comes to fullness of truth when it becomes the wisdom of faith. St Augustine, writing on *The Blessed Life*, says “How could someone be unhappy if nothing happens to him against his will, because he never wills what he sees could never happen?”

A stoical attitude of this sort, even if genuine, as a simple human attitude could seem admirable but undesirable, precisely because it seems not very “human”. But for St Augustine, such an attitude becomes human by the very fact that it is not merely human: it is received from God in faith and in love. This presupposes that one has discovered that God wants our true happiness and reveals it to us. So the condition for present and future happiness – future but already tasted in joy – is to bring our desire and our will into tune with those of God, as we go through whatever may happen to us in communion with him: “may Thy will be done.” There is nothing automatic about this: with us, God brings it about in us, taking all the time we need.... “If someone is determined to be happy” says St Augustine “he needs to obtain what stays forever and cannot be

taken away by a cruel blow of fortune. If we have God, we are happy.”

Let us try to look into this a little deeper, so as not to rest with mere principles. What happens to pleasure, what does joy do in a situation of pain, suffering or sorrow? We will limit the question strictly to what concerns us personally, to what we can say to ourselves, without making any claim to treat of the question of evil in general. As a first approach, we will suggest the theme of giving birth, which Jesus used as a parable (John 16:21). First there is fear and suffering, but they can be infused by a joy which can exist only through them: the joy of a new birth. Mysteriously, pain can prepare something new within us.

A second approach is if instead of merely undergoing misfortune, we can try to see it as a trial, or in other words as a test and a challenge. If we do this we have already distanced it a little, and placed it in front of us. And to face up to it means in some sense to be separated from it. If we remember what we saw above, that pleasure is in a certain ease in an activity, a certain quality of being, a certain perfection that we seek, then we can transpose this to the challenge. Rather than letting ourselves be crushed, we can take on the trial, paying attention to react to it in the right way, with an economy of psychological energy. “When a tribulation comes”, says St Augustine, “it will be what you wanted it to be: either a training or a condemnation. If it finds that you are made of gold, it burns away your imperfec-

tions; if it finds that you are made of straw, it burns you to ashes.”

Such an attitude sets in action our fundamental desire to be. The will renounces a particular pleasure or joy which seemed within reach, because it has to. But it does not renounce the desire for fullness on which pleasure and joy depend; it does not renounce harmony with oneself, or a way of uniting oneself in a “yes” that is far bigger than the “no” opposed to a particular pleasure or a joy. Renouncing one pleasure or another does not mean renouncing the desire to take pleasure or the desire to rejoice.

From Joy to Pleasure

What is true of happiness is true of joy as well: it needs the experience of pleasure, it needs to feel that it is itself a sort of pleasure within us. Joy needs to be sensual, affective if it is to be truly ours. Joy calls the meaning of pleasure to rise up to the level of the spiritual, in order to become our way of finding pleasure in God, in his Word, in the contemplative search, in the liturgy, in the study of theology, in the concern for one’s brother or sister. The feelings have their full place in prayer: like our will and our intelligence, they are called to sing in tune in the choir of faith. But the condition is that they must not claim to be the criterion of real prayer or love, nor must they take themselves for the goal of prayer. There is no reason to mistrust affectivity

in the spiritual life, as long as its criterion remains faith, or better, the grace of God.

Our affectivity is our most immediate relationship with who we are. Without it, we are not really ourselves. This is its essential contribution to faith. And in a similar way, since all that goes in the direction of life, of lasting life, of flourishing life is accompanied by the taste of pleasure, it is important that meeting with God, the closeness of God, and the demands of God are conceived of and felt as the outpouring of life par excellence.

We have seen that pleasure is a symbol of happiness. We could say that it can do the same for joy: pleasure can become a round-about way of finding joy. This is what we find in the following text of St Augustine: “Who can live without affection? Do you think, my brothers, that those who fear God, who honour God, who love God have no affection? Do you really think that the table, the theatre, hunting and fishing offer pleasures but that the works of God do not? That the thought of God would produce no inner affection when we look at the world and have the spectacle of nature before our eyes, when we ask ourselves who made all this and when we find that no displeasure in him – on the contrary, we find a pleasure that is quite unequalled?”

It is true that at first (and in a sense always) faith involves a severing with something: severing from our usual scale of values, our ideas, what seems to us to be real, from what we spontaneously call life, pleasure, happiness, good and evil.... It means pass-

ing from an existence of which we are the centre to an existence that leaps up towards God. We cannot sidestep conversion. But if it is not to become an artificial superstructure above us rather than something within us, faith – and this is equally true of essential joy – must be like a tree in the spring, when the sap rises within it. It needs to take hold of all that is most instinctive in us, all that is most vital, immediate, ready for pleasure, thirsty for happiness, and cause it to mount up from the roots right up to the summit. This is the energy that we are to bring to the service of the new life.

Furthermore, if joy receives from pleasure its concreteness, it brings to pleasure a new vivacity, a new intensity and wonder. Yes, if someone receives their being from God, if they accept their life from Him, then they find all kinds of pleasures they had not thought of looking for, but which come up by themselves, numerous and free. It is a little like what happens after a serious illness and one rediscovers life all over again. Nothing seems banal: as if for the first time we taste the air and the light in the room, the view from the window, the possibility of walking, the faces and gestures of those around us.... The joy of faith means really rediscovering life, with a finer sensibility, ready for wonder. And this leads to thanksgiving which is shot through with pleasure. But let us not fall into angelism: we must remember that joy requires pleasure to be like herself: open-handed, disinterested and generous, looking not in on oneself, but beyond.

Thus with all our being, we could say:

Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my
cup;

you have made my lot secure.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in
pleasant places;

surely I have a delightful inheritance.

...

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue
rejoices;

my body also will rest secure,

because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

You have made known to me the path of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

(Psalm 16)