

Opting for Joy

**“A joyful heart, that is your life. Leave sadness behind!” This appeal from a believer who lived long before Christ is also meant for us today. We undergo trials and suffering in our lives, sometimes for long periods. But we always want to try and rediscover the joy of living.
(Brother Alois, *Letter from Chile*)**

Moses (Kenya)

Personally, it has been hard for me to embrace joy in our day-to-day activities after we lost two of our family members in such a short span of time. We were asking ourselves what was going on in our life. I have been going to church praying asking God to retain our joy, and within no time the joy came back to me and my family. It's hard to find joy while living in a worldly manner, since joy is a gift from God.

Therefore by following His commandments, we are subjected to God's joy which every human in this world wants. We are asked to spread joy to others because we are the light of the world, let our light reach everyone. We should share our joy like the way we share light in Taizé on Saturdays; to me it had a big impact on my life and I drew my strength from that act of lighting the candles because I knew what it meant in my life. May our God pour joy into our life because that's what we need most in our modern life.

What brings a human life to fulfillment is not spectacular exploits, but a serene joy that touches the depths of the heart. The unfinished and fragmented character of every life, along with the suffering, is not eliminated, but this does not extinguish serenity. (Note 2)

Ryan (USA)

When I think of opting for joy, I think first of reacting in opposition to depression or sadness. But I can practice choosing joy now, even when I am granted a current, fleeting happiness. Too often, I take unthinking comfort in my good mood. But when the tide recedes and I am no longer happy, I am revealed to be completely dependent on my ephemeral emotion.

Opting for the joy of the Divine, therefore, requires moving from mindless to mindful. Instead of deciding I am entitled to happiness, I must thank God that right now, all is bright. Then I remember that my hope is not in my surroundings or in my mental state. I remind myself that the reason I act must not be self-serving; my life is not for my own happiness. However, because my good humor is temporary does not mean that it is evil. It is merely not the goal towards which I strive. And then I pray that when I eventually do find myself in darkness, I will not grope about for the world's light, but rejoice in the light of the Word.

Sometimes those who suffer poverty and deprivation are capable of a spontaneous joy in living, a joy that resists discouragement.

Maria Laura (Argentina)

The joy of those who live in poverty has always been a mystery for me. When I was 15 my life crossed the life of the poor, first as part of a missionary community and today, ten years later, with the Dominican Youth Movement searching for social justice. I cannot run away from this, aware as I am of all the rights that as a society we trample on.

And curiously, ever since I have shared with them situations of deep sadness and powerlessness, seeing people hurt and beaten, resigned and disillusioned, lonely and spiritless, without hope and inspiration, I have experienced the joy of living, because these same people taught me that in the midst of hopelessness and situations of painful injustice there is a God who walks with us day by day. They know that he supports them in their daily struggles, helping them to survive, even when they have no more strength. These people get up each day with the living trust that God is there in their midst and loves them deeply. This is shown through small signs: the care of a mother who watches her child grow, children who share the little they have with their brothers and sisters, young people enjoying a dance, women bursting into laughter during a meeting and supporting one another, old people who work together and get back the gleam in their eyes, simple and deep conversations around a bowl of *mate*, a prayer in the middle of the village. In these moments of simple communion I discovered a God who invites us to draw the best from each person and give it to others, a God who shows himself in the simple and the lowly. They are capable of hope, of hospitality, of enriching life, of

praying, of struggling, of celebrating, of feeding, of loving, and they invite me to live in communion, to share the bread of the poor and their hunger as well.

Thanks to them I have learned that happiness is not a personal search, but a fellowship of body and blood, of life and death, of sorrow and hope, of yours and mine. Today I want to remain in the midst of the poor because I know that together we discover the joy of living.

Love shown to us engenders a happiness which gradually fills the depths of the soul. And then we are led to make a conscious choice, to opt for joy.

Rosalia and Pablo (Spain)

In the summer of 2005, at the doors of the Church of Reconciliation, where thousands of young people were waiting to enter for Brother Roger's funeral celebration, God wanted our paths to cross. A few hours later we already knew that that immense gift would lead us to disrupt our plans and our lives, because the things of God are like that, surprising and beautiful.

From those first days spent together on the hill a word has rung out in our hearts: simplicity of life. That simplicity was very attractive to us, and we decided to follow that intuition, to commit ourselves to living a simpler life together. That way of living is what allows us to rediscover the joy of daily living, the simplicity of the everyday, the beauty of what really matters, the risk to go out searching for others and to find ourselves open to what arises.

Now, more than five years later, this is our way of opting for joy. And as a married couple expecting our first child, we cannot stop giving thanks for this discovery, which we live as a gift from God.

The Holy Spirit sets the joy of the Risen Christ in the depths of our being. It is not only there when everything is easy. When we are faced with a challenging task, the effort can reawaken joy.

Jessa (Philippines)

Our country is suffering from economic crisis and a lot of people and families are in poverty. Not all families can have three meals a day. Some families have to raise seven or nine children at once, without even having a stable job or getting well compensated for this. Yet you can see that the people, despite this sad reality, can smile and continue with their life. We don't have a lot in life, financially or materially, but we see the other good side of this. We give more importance to things that are more meaningful, like our family, our friends, the people that surround us, that love, support and care for us. Yes, it's a fact we don't have a lot in terms of money, but we simply give more value to things in life which are free, and that makes us joyful.

Opting for joy is really a choice. People have to be faithful and keep on trusting. So as a young person in my country I also live by this and I try to be positive, to be optimistic and I know that despite all the things that are happening God will always be there.

The Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote: "Joy about nothing concrete, joy from the beyond; the joy of God's presence touching the soul. And the experience of this touch, of this joy will determine the course, the direction of one's thoughts and one's relationship to life." (Note 3)

Fiodar (Belarus)

Sometimes when you read an author's writings, you feel an inherent "thread", a mood, which is shown not by ideas or points the author is writing about, but rather a kind of light which is reflected in all the writer's works. In the writings of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann this thread, this light, was joy. He was truly "the apostle of joy."

When I finished reading his Journal, the presence, the feeling of Gospel joy in the Holy Spirit remained in me. Sometimes he grumbles, sometimes he sharply criticizes different sides of the Church and of the secular world. But his criticism is always about the lack of joy, the inability to rejoice. Fr. Alexander wrote that refusal of joy is the "origin of false religion." "It is impossible to know that God exists and not rejoice."