

PASTORAL
LETTER

MSGR. FERNANDO OCÁRIZ

Joy

10/03/2025

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PASTORAL LETTER

ON JOY

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz
Prelate of Opus Dei
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My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

1. In this brief letter, following a suggestion one of your sisters made a few weeks ago, I would like to reflect with you on a few aspects of joy, especially by considering some words of St. Josemaría.

Joy, in general, is the effect of the possession and experience of something good. Depending on the type of goodness, joy has a greater or lesser intensity and permanence. When the joy is not the consequence of some particular experience of a good, but the consequence of one's whole existence, it is usually called happiness. In any case, the deepest joy and happiness is that which is principally rooted in love.

These are difficult times in the world and in the Church (and the Work is a small part of the Church). Actually, in one way or another all times have had their lights and shadows. For this reason it is especially necessary to foster a joyful attitude. Always and in every circumstance we can and should be happy, because this is what our Lord wants: "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (*Jn* 15:11). He said this to the apostles and, in them, to all of us who would come afterwards. Therefore "joy is a condition proper to the life of the children of God."¹

On the contrary, "the sadness which is a vice is caused by a disordered self-love, and this self-love is not a special vice, but the general root of the vices."² This statement by St. Thomas could surprise us if we think, for example, of someone suffering because of the death of a loved one. In reality, such a situation would not necessarily bring sadness in that sense, but rather sorrow, which is not the same thing. In fact, it is a common experience that not all sorrow or all renunciation causes sadness, especially when they are accepted with love and for love. Thus a mother's sacrifices for her children, at times very great, can produce pain and sorrow, but without causing sadness.

"To be happy, what you need is not an easy life but a heart in love."³ All of us who saw and heard our Father in Villa Tevere during the last seven or eight years of his life saw that he was truly content and happy, even though he suffered greatly during these years, both physically and, above all, because of the serious difficulties in the life of the Church.

The joy of faith

2. Our natural joy, elevated by grace, is found especially in union with God's plans. To the shepherds at Bethlehem, the angels announce the "great joy" (*Lk* 2:10) of Jesus' birth; when the

¹ *Letter 13*, no. 99. The quotations where the author is not mentioned are by St. Josemaría.

² St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 28, a. 4, ad 1. "Sadness is the dross of selfishness" (*Friends of God*, no. 92)

³ *Furrow*, no. 795.

Magi see the star again, “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (*Mt* 2:10). Finally, the apostles were filled with joy at seeing the Risen Jesus (cf. *Jn* 20:20).

Christian joy is not merely the joy of a “healthy animal,”⁴ but the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the soul (cf. *Gal* 5:22). And it is usually permanent, since it is grounded in God, as St. Paul exhorts: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (*Phil* 4:4).

This joy *in the Lord* is the joy of faith in his fatherly love: “Cheerfulness is a necessary consequence of our divine filiation, of knowing that our Father God loves us with a love of predilection, that he welcomes us, helps us and forgives us. Remember this and never forget it: even if it should seem at times that everything is collapsing, *nothing* is collapsing at all, because God does not lose battles.”⁵

Nevertheless, in the face of difficulties or suffering, our personal weakness can cause this joy to wane, especially because of a possible weakness at those times of our faith in God’s omnipotent love for us. “A child of God, a Christian who lives by faith, can suffer and cry; he or she may have reasons to be sorrowful, but never to be sad.”⁶ And therefore in order to foster, or recover, joy, it is good to renew the conviction of our faith in God’s love. This conviction enables us to say with St. John: “We have come to know and believe the love God has for us” (*1 Jn* 4:16).

Faith tends to express itself, in one way or another (with words or without words), in prayer. And with prayer comes joy, because “when a Christian lives by faith, with a faith that is not merely a word, but a reality expressed in personal prayer, the certainty of divine love is manifested in joy, in interior freedom.”⁷

Rejoice in your hope (Rom 12:12)

3. Faith in God’s love for us brings with it great hope. This enables us to understand the definition given in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (*Heb* 11:1). Hope has as its specific object a future and possible good. And the good that faith leads us to hope to attain is, above all, full happiness and joy in definitive union with God in glory. As St. Paul tells us, it is “the hope kept safe for you in heaven” (*Col* 1:5). This certainty gives us the assurance that we will not lack the means to reach this goal if we freely accept them, that is, the means to begin and begin again, as often as necessary.

⁴ Cf. *The Way*, no. 659.

⁵ *The Forge*, no. 332.

⁶ “The Riches of Faith,” published in the *ABC* newspaper on 2 November 1969.

⁷ *Ibid.*

At times, in various ways, God's will is made known to us and makes us feel inadequate and powerless. But even then we can have "the assurance of the impossible,"⁸ like our Father at the beginning of the Work, when the means needed were totally absent and he was living in a social environment deeply opposed to Christian life.

4. We have, and can always have, a hope that "does not disappoint," not because of assurance in ourselves or in anything in this world, but "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (*Rom 5:5*).

Sometimes, difficulties of various kinds can lead us to think, for example, that our apostolic work is not effective, that we fail to see any fruit from our efforts and prayers. But we know very well – and we should frequently renew this conviction of faith – that in the Lord our work is not in vain (cf. *1 Cor 15:58*). And, as our Father assured us, "Nothing is lost."

Hope and joy are gifts from God. This is what St. Paul asks for everyone: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (*Rom 15:13*).

The joy of a heart in love

5. Love for God and for others is linked, along with joy, to faith and to hope. "One who loves has the joy of hope, of reaching the encounter with the great love that is the Lord."⁹

The various descriptions of love agree in what is essential: desiring – and to the extent possible, seeking – the good of the person who is loved, along with the consequent joy that comes from knowing that this good is finally present.

In the case of our love for God, does this include desiring for him a good he does not have? We know that, in creating us as free beings, God wanted to run the *risk* of our freedom.¹⁰ We can refuse to give to God something that he desires: our love. In a certain way, the joy involved in loving God is not just that aspect of the love found in the good that it means for us, but also the joy of being able to give our love to God.

Love, as a source of joy, is manifested in a special way in giving ourselves to others, striving to be, despite our defects, "sowers of peace and joy."¹¹ Moreover, in this way we rejoice in seeing the joy of others and, like our Father, we can truly say to them: "My joy is your joy."¹²

⁸ *Letter 29*, no. 60.

⁹ Francis, Audience, 15 March 2017.

¹⁰ Cf. *Friends of God*, no. 35.

¹¹ *Furrow*, no. 59.

¹² *Letter 14*, no. 1.

6. “True love demands going out of ourselves, giving ourselves. Genuine love brings joy in its wake, a joy that has its roots in the shape of the Cross.”¹³ Especially, the Cross accepted out of love for God is a source of happiness. This is our Lord’s teaching: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (*Mt* 5:11-12). In fact, all the Beatitudes describe the roots of joy: “The Beatitudes always lead you to joy; they are the path to joy.”¹⁴

There are many causes for a person losing their joy, especially the clear experience of their own weakness, the awareness of their sins. But faith in God’s love and the sure hope that accompanies that faith are the foundation, as St. Josemaría said, of “the deep joy of repentance.”¹⁵ And then, despite our limitations and defects, with our Lord’s help and with our affection we can help “make the path of others pleasant and easy.”¹⁶

We invoke the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, as *Causa nostrae laetitiae*. May our Lady help us to be always happy and to be sowers of peace and joy in all the circumstances of our lives. We ask her for this in a special way now in this jubilee year of hope, closely united to the suffering of Pope Francis.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rome, March 10, 2025

¹³ *The Forge*, no. 28.

¹⁴ Francis, Homily, 29 January 2020.

¹⁵ *Letter 14 February 1974*, no. 7.

¹⁶ *Furrow*, no. 63.