Estimated Reading Time: 6:22 Minutes

My Spirit Rejoices in God my Savior

Part Four: The Society of Mary and Worship

In the previous meditation, *"Part Three: Keep Holy the Lord's Day,"* I reflected on the shopping mall as a type of secular temple or cathedral. I noted that the mall does not care about our thoughts or beliefs. Instead, it cares about what we want. Everything in the store intends to woo us into falling in love with its products, and the promise of happiness material goods can offer. It preaches a gospel or good news that these products will make us feel popular, adventuresome, attractive, successful, healthy, and happy. Its version of eternal life is living the good life here on earth. Its version of happiness belongs to this world.

In contrast, the Church intends that we fall in love with Christ, who said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11) In the following paragraphs, I explore the joy about which Jesus speaks, which is different from the happiness of this world, and that worshipping at the secular cathedral offers its "faithful." It becomes accessible only if we are willing to bend the knee, "…to adore God and acknowledge him as God, the Creator, and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. (CCC #2096)

I will begin by following Jesus' lead in Luke 14: 25-33, where he says, "…anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." That leads me to recall Fr. Colin's insistence that Marists say NO to greed. He is picking up on what Jesus is saying here and teaches in the Beatitudes, "…from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back." (Luke 6: 29 -30). Then, of course, there is Jesus himself, who dies on the cross, humiliated, rejected, and without any of the possessions that our sinful world insists we must have if we are to be happy.

Jesus, on the other hand, insists, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27). Jesus then doubles down and asserts: "Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." (Lk 14:33) That would disqualify him as a salesperson or evangelist on behalf of the shopping mall.

Jesus continues, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:26) What is Jesus getting at here? How can we give away all that we possess and live, let alone be happy? How can we hate the ones we love the most and be happy? Going to the mall is beginning to look more attractive and reasonable!

What is the cross of which Jesus speaks? Often we equate it with an illness or loss of a loved one, a job, or some other bad news that is thrust upon us and we must carry. That is partly true, but Jesus has something else in mind, something fundamental, something that will make us happy, and something worth dying for. "What is *that?"* you may ask.

The way of the cross is a metaphor that Jesus uses to describe his way of living and loving that should define any disciple of his. His way of love is sacrificial because it involves emptying ourselves and loving another; meaning, willing the good of another person when there is nothing in it for ourselves: no thank you, no pat on the back, no awards, no recognition, no success upon which we can hang our hats. It is willing the good of the other for their sake and not for our benefit. It is an act of the will and is not based on our feelings. In other words, we do not have to like the person we love or on whose behalf we do what is good and right. Often, we will not. It means loving anyway and especially when our efforts are met with scorn, ridicule, and rejection.

That hurts. Our egos crave attention, approval, and recognition. To be denied them will feel like dying on a cross. Do you see the point I am making? Following Jesus and carrying your cross daily is a code for

accepting the suffering that inevitably comes from being an ambassador of Christ and his way of loving in our contemporary society.

Why should we follow Jesus? Well, he is not just another philosopher or celebrity. He is truly human and truly divine. He is the Son of God who is love and who wants what is good for us. Our response to such a loving God is to love in return. That is the great principle of the Christian spiritual life: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind." (Luke 10:27) Since Jesus is God incarnate, we should love him first, and nothing else, and no one else should come between that relationship and us. Whatever he says goes!

Now listen to Jesus, using hyperbole—exaggeration for effect—tell us: "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:26) How can Jesus, who tells us to love our enemy, now tell us to hate those who mean the most to us? What is Jesus talking about? Well, whenever you make doing the will of those who mean the most to you the determining factor in living your life, whenever you make fulfilling their dreams to be of the highest importance, whenever you have assigned their opinions as having ultimate authority in your life; then, you have attributed to them the allegiance that belongs to Jesus. You must hate them to the extent that they have come between you and your relationship with him.

Jesus includes hating our own life; meaning, if the hopes and dreams for your life get in the way of living the way of the cross, of self-sacrificing love for others; then you should hate your life to the extent that it has come between you and your relationship with Jesus

Listen again to Jesus, who says, "…anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33) In other words, if your love for material things gets in the way of your love for God or following Jesus' way of the cross, the way of self-sacrificing love for others, then hate them because they have come between you and your relationship with Jesus. That is in stark opposition to the secular happiness cathedrals called shopping malls proclaim as gospel.

You may ask, "Tell me again how all of this will make me happy?" I will end by answering that question this way. Bishop Robert Barron, bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, tells the story of Edith Stein. She was a Jewish Catholic and a Carmelite nun whom the Gestapo arrested during World War II. She was put on a train to Auschwitz that would become her personal Calvary.

After the War, some people on that train described how they had watched her comforting those near her. Peace and calm radiated from her as she prayed with those who were terrified. She, along with everyone else on that train, was deprived of everything we equate with happiness: money, power, pleasure, fame, and honor, which we never seem to have enough of and greedily want more.

She who had none of those things possessed something far more valuable. She was at peace with who she was, satisfied that she was fulfilling her purpose or vocation. She also was happy knowing that all of this was pleasing to Jesus, whose way of the cross, the way of self-sacrificing love, she had made her own. *That* happiness or joy no shopping mall can offer is beyond what the secular mindset can envision. It is a by-product of loving Christ and conforming our lives to his.

Reception of the Eucharist does not end with consuming the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass. Edith Stein is a case in point. She received the Risen Christ in Holy Communion, but that is not where the Mass ended. In the words of St. Augustine, the goal of Holy Communion is to become what we received, the Body of Christ. Edith Stein received the grace for which we pray during one of the prefaces at Mass, that the Lord will see and love in us what he sees and loves in his Son. That is the highest praise and the most precious gift we can offer (worship) the Lord. That is why we can say the Mass never ends because we are constantly becoming what we receive in Holy Communion, the Body of Christ.

For that to happen, we must remain in Christ, in the Church, his mystical body. That is the meaning of "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) To remain in Christ is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind. (Luke 10:27) That disposition lends itself to worship.

That is what it looks like, "To adore God [which] is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that he [The Mighty One] has done great things [for me] and holy is his name." (CCC #2097)

If we remain in Christ, like Mary, then like her, we will proclaim the Lord's greatness and, with her, will *rejoice* in God our savior. (Luke 1:46-47)