

Combat, Closeness, Mission (20): Sowers of Peace and Joy

Much of our apostolate consists of sharing our serene joy with the hearts of those who are troubled and without hope.

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Lying on the floor with a candle that barely gives off any light, the poor woman cannot hide her frustration. Over and over again, the same reproaches run through her mind as her tired eyes search every corner of

her house, with less and less hope. One of her ten silver coins has disappeared; and with it, a full day's work at the very least. It may not be a tragedy in the grand scheme of things, but she refuses to resign herself to losing those savings without trying to recover the coin (cf. Lk 15:8).

Few sensations are as disheartening as misplacing something essential in our own home. To the inconvenience of the loss we add the intuition that, although we cannot see it, the object must be quite close at hand. Something similar occurs with that fullness of heart we call happiness. Ordinarily, when things go well, happiness is for us like a coin sitting safely in our purse: we pay little attention to it. But as soon as sadness takes hold of us or our heart grows cold for any reason, we start asking ourselves where it slipped away...

Allowing God to find us

In the midst of her strenuous search, the woman notices a faint silver glimmer across the room. She rises slowly and fixes her gaze on the lower part of a small table. As she moves closer, with growing certainty, the coin reflects the light of the candle in her hand, and with it her joy and hope return (cf. Lk 15:8–9).

This very short and simple parable is surprising, among other things, because of Jesus' interpretation of it. He makes us see that the coin is ourselves — each one of us, each sinner — and that God and all his angels rejoice every time they find us (cf. Lk 15:10). The disproportion between the coin's value and the woman's joy, which moves her to invite her neighbours to celebrate, is meant to illustrate just how far the mercy of God surpasses every human measure. But it also helps us identify

the true source of our happiness: letting ourselves be found by God. The deepest joy we can experience is the joy that fills the Lord's heart and overflows towards us each time we allow Him to love us.

We might think that, beautiful as all this is, it is still easier to rejoice when we succeed or when things go well for those we love. Joy is, after all, a feeling that accompanies the possession of something good.^[1] And yet, as Saint Josemaría writes, “the cheerfulness you should have is not the kind we might call physiological good spirits — the happiness of a healthy animal. You must seek something more: the supernatural happiness that comes from the abandonment of everything and the abandonment of yourself into the loving arms of our Father-God.”^[2] This is the deepest source of our joy, which consists not so much in possessing particular goods as in a

disposition of the heart: the joy of the children of God. “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).”^[3]

It is natural, of course, to wish for success and health for ourselves and for others. We do so constantly, for instance when we wish someone a good day or good luck in facing a challenge or setback. Moreover, from a perspective of faith, enjoying good things is a way of being grateful to God who, in his providence, always cares for us tenderly. All the good things in life can move us to exclaim with Tobit: “Blessed are you, because you have made me happy; what I feared has not happened, but you have dealt with us according to your great mercy” (Tb 8:16). They may

even lead us to share our happiness, because every time things go well for us and we feel that healthy joy of living, we can hear within ourselves those wise words Saint Paul attributes to Jesus: “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35). Our moments of prayer can be times to ask ourselves how to share those goods and that joy with others. In this way, moments of prosperity will lead us to God too.

Even so, we know that the joy we were created for has no expiry date. What our heart desires most deeply is not that everything should go well here on earth, but that things may “go well” for us in Heaven: that we may love God eternally, together with many people we love. We could easily lose sight of that perspective if we were inattentive in our relationship with God; we would then drift towards a worldly sort of

faith or piety. For this reason, it is worthwhile to ask ourselves from time to time what sort of intentions prevail in our prayer. We can ask God, who is our Father, anything. But what do we give more importance to: health and professional success, or drawing closer to God and bringing others nearer to Him? What moves me to pray more: the hope of a future without financial worries, or the conversion of a friend or relative? Am I more concerned about food and clothing, or about the Kingdom of God and his justice (cf. Mt 6:33)?

“I would gladly be sad”

“Why do we men become dejected?” Saint Josemaría once wrote. “It is because life on earth does not go the way we had hoped, or because obstacles arise which prevent us from satisfying our personal ambitions.”^[4] The good and the bad both suffer over these things. Saint

Augustine explains: “They suffer together not because they live a wicked life together, but because they love the present life together.”^[5]

This type of sadness is natural, and it reveals a love for life. It can be an occasion for conversion, for reordering things. If, however, sadness takes root in our hearts, beyond that initial disappointment, it may be because we had turned the goods we have lost into idols, or because we were seeking joy in fleeting things. This is why sorrow can sometimes open a door for us to desire the happiness of Heaven, where God will “find us” forever, even more intensely. It is the promise hidden in Jesus’ consoling beatitude: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mt 5:4).

But it is also possible to experience, from time to time, a kind of sorrow that arises from our temporal

condition, the ups and downs of life, and the uncertainty that comes with it. The veil of mystery that at times hides from us the deeper meaning of events can lead to a more general or undefined sadness, especially for those with a melancholic temperament. There is a reason that a traditional Marian prayer describes this world as a “vale of tears.”^[6]

Those moments of genuine sorrow should not trouble us excessively, because they often reveal a depth of feeling that can help us enter more fully into the problems of the world and the mysteries of the human soul. What matters is that such sadness does not lead us into isolation or to lose trust in God. This is why our Father once asked: “What if my Cross should consist in boredom or sadness? — In that case I say to you, Lord, with You I would gladly be sad.”^[7] It is possible to suffer while, at the same time, continuing to trust in

God, accepting his will even when it seems mysterious to us. Upon the sudden death of a loved one, for example, how could we fail to recall Christ's profoundly human tears at the death of his good friend Lazarus? Yet, in that moment of sorrow, Jesus bears powerful witness to his relationship with the Father: "Father, I thank you for having heard me; I know that you always hear me" (Jn 11:41–42).

"My soul is sorrowful, even to death" (Mt 26:38). It is difficult to imagine what went through the apostles' minds when they heard these words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but it is harder still to glimpse the interior of his human soul. It is a mystery that Jesus, though always enjoying the vision of his divinity, could undergo such a moment of sadness and anguish. Nonetheless, we know how his prayer ends: "Not as I will, but as you

will” (Mt 26:38). Doing the will of God and accepting his plans is not always easy. At times, faced with uncertainty or a difficult decision, we may feel a kind of sadness like Jesus did; and, at the same time, possess deep within our soul, beneath that layer of mist, the joy of knowing we are children of God. As the psalmist says, “With you at my side, I desire nothing on earth” (Ps 73:25).

“Not all sorrow or all renunciation causes sadness, especially when they are accepted with love and for love.”^[8] “The disciple who lovingly seeks the Master finds that sadness, worries and afflictions now taste very differently: they disappear as soon as we truly accept God's Will, as soon as we carry out his plans gladly, as faithful children of his, even though our nerves may seem to be at breaking point and the pain impossible to bear.”^[9] Whenever we accept the will of God, the joy of the

Resurrection always awaits us after the Cross. We will hear Jesus whispering in our ear: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (Jn 16:20).

Throwing a celebration

Coin in hand, the woman runs out of her house to share the good news. She seeks out neighbours and friends to share her joy and tell them how she found it. “Rejoice with me! I have found the coin that I lost” (Lk 15:9).

Joy is expansive: it tends towards celebration. This is why it is natural that we should want to share that sense of peace within us: the peace of knowing we are loved, or *found*, by God. Much of our apostolate consists in spreading our serene joy to hearts weighed down and without hope, so that they may want to join God’s celebration (cf. Mt 22:4). For this reason, Saint Josemaría described

the vocation to the Work and the vocation of all Christians as an invitation to be “sowers of peace and joy.” Christian apostolate, he once said, “is not a political program or a cultural alternative. It implies the spreading of good, infecting others with a desire to love, sowing peace and joy.”^[10]

Some celebrations are superficial, because they place the emphasis on individual experiences rather than on the encounter between persons, on self-seeking rather than communion.^[11] By its very simplicity, the parable of this woman directs us back to the essence of a celebration: shared joy. We can appreciate that the celebration she organises to announce her joy would have been paid for with the very coin she had just found. Here we glimpse an additional level of that divine logic, so far removed from calculation: where our instinct might be to save,

God speaks to us of sparing no expense (cf. Lk 15:22–23).

Each one of us, let us not forget, is that coin. He comes to look for us so that, through our self-giving, He may reach many more men and women in their deep thirst for happiness. For this, we need to let ourselves be spent like the drachma, knowing that in the love of God we possess a richness no one can take from us: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?” (Rom 8:35).

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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the consolation with which we

ourselves are comforted by God!” (2 Cor 1:3–4). Because we are consoled by God at every moment — bearing wounds and insecurities, “afflicted, but always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10) — the Lord sends us forth to console all those we meet along our way. “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”^[12] Our “bright and cheerful homes,”^[13] as Saint Josemaría liked to refer to our family homes and the centres of the Work, will be so not because of external perfection, but because they are places where God’s mercy is celebrated, and they therefore radiate a profound happiness. “I tell you: there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15:10).

[1] F. Ocáriz, Pastoral letter,
10-03-2025.

[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 659.

[3] F. Ocáriz, Pastoral letter,
10-03-2025, no. 4.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no.
108.

[5] St. Augustine, *City of God*, I, IX, no.
3.

[6] *Salve Regina*.

[7] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 252.

[8] F. Ocáriz, Pastoral letter,
10-03-2025, no. 1.

[9] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, n.
311.

[10] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing
By*, n. 124.

[11] Cf. J. Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, St. Augustine Press, 1999.

[12] Pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

[13] St. Josemaría, *Letter 29*, no. 57 ff; *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 22, 27ff.

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