

**“There is no sadness in the presence of Jesus, only the joy of knowing and loving God.”**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

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*Mass  
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Cardinal Dolan of New York tells a great story of an experience he had as a priest. He was working in Washington and assisted sometimes in a hospice for patients dying of AIDS that was run by Mother Teresa's sisters. On Good Friday he led the service there for the sisters, volunteers, and patients. Then he went to the bedridden patients so they could venerate the cross. He saw one very emaciated man who was beckoning him to come over, but the sisters warned him to be careful, because he had been violent before. He even bit those who tried to care for him. But Fr. Dolan went over to him and held out the cross for him to venerate. The man grasped the cross and kissed the face of the crucified Lord. Then he lay back exhausted. The next day, on Holy Saturday, the sisters called Fr. Dolan to tell him that the same man wanted to see him again. So he went back to the hospice, and the man said he wanted to be baptized. When Fr. Dolan asked him to explain his desire, the man said "I know nothing about Christianity or the Catholic Church. I've hated religion all my life. All I do know is that I've been here for three months dying. These sisters are always happy! When I curse them, they look at me with compassion in their eyes. Even when they clean up after me, they are smiling. When they spoon-feed me, there is radiance in their eyes. All I know is that they have joy and I don't. When I ask them why they are so happy, all they answer is "Jesus." I want this Jesus. Baptize me and give me this Jesus. Give me joy."

I want Jesus. Give me joy. I've never heard a better explanation for the power of Christian joy. The joy and peace of a few sisters was able to break through the hardest of hearts, and a man's soul was transformed. He was baptized and received into the embrace of Christ in his Church. I have no doubt that he is in the arms of God right now. I wonder, though, how his story would have changed without the joy of those sisters.

My friends, we are people of faith who believe in Jesus, and if that's true, then we must also be people of joy. Think about this. Who has a greater reason for joy than we do? Who has a greater motive to be joyful than those who believe in Christ? After all, Jesus is the Son of God who came among us, who even made himself one of us. Did he do this just to observe and experience what we're up to? No. He did this in order to lift us out of the darkness and sadness of sin and to give us a share in his joy, the joy that he has with his Father. Jesus said to the apostles, "I have told you all this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." Jesus wants nothing more than to share with us his joy, the joy of communion with his Father, and he came to give us this joy to the full.

This weekend the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Christ the King, the final event in the Church year before we begin again with Advent. This Solemnity reminds us that Jesus is our glorious king, that he has won the victory over sin and death, and now he dwells in majesty with the Father. There is no sadness in the presence of Jesus, but only the joy of knowing and loving

God. In fact, he came on earth to inaugurate a kingdom, a kingdom that is free from sin and sadness, a kingdom that is filled with holiness and joy.

During my years as a priest and bishop, I've discovered that the holiest people I know are also people of joy. Sure, they have their difficulties and sometimes they even suffer. But even so, they have joy. They can see beyond the challenges and struggles of their lives, and they know that come what may, Jesus is with them and will never leave them. They are joyful. Not in a phony, superficial way, but truly and deeply joyful, because they have put their faith and trust in God. And they have come out of themselves and are willing to give to others. They are the ones Jesus tells us about in the Gospel, the ones who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick. They are generous, and they are joyful.

Another thing that I've realized is that sin inevitably brings sadness. It might seem to give pleasure, but that's not the same thing as joy. Sin never gives lasting joy; it always leaves us dissatisfied, either with someone else or with ourselves. Sin always leaves us empty after the thrill or the pleasure has passed, and then we're just sad. But goodness, holiness fills us with joy because it's a communion with God himself, the source of all joy. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again, rejoice!" Now keep in mind that Paul was in prison when he wrote those words. He could have been bitter or depressed, but instead he was joyful, and he wanted his friends in faith to be joyful too.

There are lots of people out there who really haven't found the kingdom of our Lord. They haven't found the joy that Jesus offers us. And there are others who try to start their own kingdoms, kingdoms without Jesus, kingdoms without the joy that Jesus offers. Those kingdoms will always leave us disappointed and dissatisfied because they cannot give us Christ. We were made for God, we were made for joy, and we belong in the kingdom that Jesus himself has established. Anything less just won't do it.

Friends, if we want the joy of Jesus, then we need to be part of the kingdom that he is building. If we want to have the joy of receiving God's love, then our place is with Jesus. Pope Francis has been talking a lot about joy in this past year, and he is encouraging all of us to really live the joy of the Gospel. Jesus doesn't want us to be sad, he wants us to be happy in him. Pope Francis says that we shouldn't come out of church like we just came from a funeral! We need to open ourselves to the grace of Christ so we can also receive his joy. And when we have that joy, we can convey it to others, we can be witnesses of the love of Jesus to others. That's what those sisters were able to do for the man dying of AIDS. They witnessed love to him, they lived joyfully, and he was touched by their joy. Just think how many of your friends are looking for that same kind of joy. Just think how many there are who misunderstand Jesus and his Church, who think it's all about rules, all about sadness and not being able to do what you want. But we know better. We know that the kingdom of Christ is the happiest, the most joyful place to be, because that's where we find the ultimate meaning of our lives in him.

So, do we get to keep to ourselves in this kingdom, and just relax and enjoy? No! Jesus is sending us on a mission, he needs us to be apostles, apostles of joy. Our Lord needs us to live our faith in a way that others can come to know it and know him. He needs us to let others know that there is nothing more joyful, nothing more satisfying than being close to him, than being a member of his family, his kingdom. Don't be afraid to share the joy with others. You never know what impact your quiet prayer, or your act of compassion, or your simple smile might have on someone. Everything we do matters. There is someone out there waiting to know Jesus, waiting to enter into his kingdom. And your faith and joy might be just the ticket to get him there.