

Pure joy awaits all of us

By Pastor Chris Costrini

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Somewhere along the way we decided that dour, sour looking old men make the ideal Christians. Visit any church; look at the icons, statues and pictures on display. Where are the smiles? Only perhaps on pictures of children will we find smiling faces. Even in our Nativity scenes, this supposed depiction of one joyous occasion, no one is smiling. You would think, if nothing else, Joseph could manage a little grin when that wise man dropped a sack of gold in his lap.

I don't know how we got that joyless ideal, but it's unfortunate. Joyfulness pleases God! "For the kingdom of God is ... of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God" (Romans 14: 17-18, ESV). Being joyful also makes you easier to live with and makes you feel a lot better.

Despite what we might think, joy is not a personality trait. It isn't the person who is giggly and bubbly and seemingly happy all the time. True joy is a response to God.

It is a response to who He is: "in your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16: 11, ESV). A response to what He does: "For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy" (Psalm 92: 4, ESV). We rejoice in His salvation; "May we shout for joy over your salvation" (Psalm 20: 5, ESV).

Too often we tie our joy to what is happening in our lives at the present moment. When good things happen, joy follows. When life is rough, joy is absent. May I humbly suggest that we are focusing on the wrong things? We should instead focus on the bigger picture.

"Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for you, for behold your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6: 22-23, ESV). Not much could be more depressing than being hated. But in the big picture it's a cause for joy.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4: 4). God has given us a great salvation, and much beyond our basic needs. Indeed our "cup runneth over." In that we can find our joy.