

St. Paul starts our Second Reading with: “Rejoice always ... In all circumstances give thanks.” Are you kidding me? Is he serious? Is that even possible? Are we supposed to be like Pollyanna and sugarcoat everything? ... That’s not what he’s saying. It’s like the late Conservative William F. Buckley Jr. said: “Words are important, but it’s the nuance that matters.” The nuance – the subtle shade of meaning of a word. St. Paul isn’t talking about happiness the way most people understand it. He’s writing about a deep down *attitude* of joy that Christians need to carry in good times and in bad.

How can we rejoice always, how can it be our normal attitude that endures in us, no matter what’s going on? Because Jesus was resurrected to save us and give us eternal life – our own resurrection. It’s what the prophet Isaiah spoke in the First Reading where he says: “I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation.” Christians interpret Isaiah in the light of Christ, for the salvation Christ gives us.

For St. Paul, joy results from thankfulness to God, thanking God not just for our personal blessings, but thanking God for the birth, death and Resurrection of Jesus, who reconciled us to God and gives eternal life and joy in his company now and forever. God is the source of our attitude of joy. We have joy from the birth of Christ, and all that followed from it to our benefit. Our joy is the joy of the Resurrection that will be ours. We have a destiny!

St. Paul tells us to rejoice always – to maintain our joy in the Resurrection in every adversity: if we lose a job or a loved one, if trauma changes our lives, if we become chronically ill. Again, Paul doesn’t mean that we stay all bubbly in these circumstances when we’re hurting or in pain, physically or emotionally. He means that deep down we know that all of these afflictions are temporary and that we have a future with Christ; and that joyful hope will see us through. Jesus’s Resurrection will be ours! It’s the joy that he’s opened the doors of heaven for his faithful followers and that we’ll be safe.

The ultimate adversity we can suffer is death. No Christian should be afraid of death, because we have a future in store for us. Have confidence in your salvation! Stop doubting it! Jesus doesn’t ask for perfect followers; he asks us to be faithful followers. If you are trying to live more and more like Jesus, you will be safe despite your sins!

For St. Paul, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, given to us at Baptism, where we received salvation through Jesus Christ. We received fellowship with Jesus and if we stay faithful – not perfect – we don’t lose it. We have something to look forward to, from knowing we are loved by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now our joy from the Resurrection isn’t just for our own benefit. St. Paul writes about joy to the Thessalonians so they use their joy in the Resurrection to build up their faith community, their struggling church, their communion of imperfect, faithful believers. Joy is the attitude and building block that makes parishes possible and productive.

Maintaining an attitude of joy in the Resurrection is what holds a parish together and makes it thrive, even through its difficulties. Joy in the Resurrection helps us to support each other, to comfort each other. Let’s have joy in our words and in our deeds for each other here in this parish, because joy builds up this Body of Christ. We share our joy in the Resurrection with our Christian brothers and sisters; we don’t keep it to ourselves.

We look forward to when Christ’s comes again, because we hold the joy of the Resurrection in our hearts. If we are faithful, not perfect, we will live with God forever. Dismiss any thoughts to the contrary!

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