

■ “Are you happy?” How would you honestly answer that? My suspicion is ~~that~~, for most of us, this would be a painful question to ask, given our fantasy of what happiness should be, we might tend to answer in the negative: “No, I don’t think I’m happy. I would like to be, but there are too many limitations and frustrations in my life which block happiness.”

■ To stare that question square in the face can make ^{one even} ~~you~~ more unhappy. A torturous self-scrutiny can result from it. *What this suggests* is perhaps it is not a good question to ask in the first place. To ask: “Am I happy?” is to confuse things and to begin to demand things from life and from God that are not realistic.

■ For a Christian, there is a better question. The question should not be, “Am I happy?” but rather, “Is my life meaningful?”

■ What God has promised us in Christ is not a life free from pain, sickness, loneliness, oppression, and death. The preacher who tells you that you will have less pain in life if you take Jesus seriously is not in touch with the gospel. ~~When Jesus became human, we call~~ ^{human → this} ~~this~~ the incarnation. ^{Jesus becoming} ~~We call~~ ~~this~~ the incarnation. What the incarnation promises is not that Christ will do away with our pain, but that God will be with us in ^{our} ~~that~~ pain. That is something quite different. If you take the gospel seriously, you will probably have more pain in your life because you will be a more compassionate and sensitive person.

^{However,} ■ Is your faith deep enough so that ~~your~~ life, no matter how painful, makes some sense in the context of the gospel? To take the gospel seriously is not to be given immunity from the human condition. For the Christian, as for everyone else, there will be the same sicknesses, the same cold lonely seasons, the same painful frustrations, the same choices that are regretted, and the same bitter

losses. Like everyone else, too, eventually we will have to face ^{our own} death. Faith in God does not save us from the frustration, misunderstanding, loneliness, and death, in this world. Faith does not offer a life free of pain. What God does promise is to be with us in that pain. That is why Jesus' is named Emmanuel, which means God-is-with-us.

- To have faith in God is to have God with you. Faith does not give you a way out of the human condition, but rather places you at the heart of it.
- Jesus enables us to believe that human life, with all its contradictions, is the place where God is found. The Incarnation gives us strength to face up to the harsh realities of our fragmented world, to feel and to transmit God's reconciling love. The Incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from this life and climb the heights of heaven. Rather it enables us to live in the heart of this world and find it shinning with divinity, find it shinning with God.
- Where ever God is and whenever His will is done, that is the Kingdom of God. That the King and the kingdom we celebrate today.
- The Kingdom of God is a space. It exists in every home where parents and children love each other. It exists in every region and country that cares for its weak and vulnerable. It exists in every parish that reaches out to the needy.
- The Kingdom of God is a time. It happens whenever someone feeds a hungry ^{man} ~~person~~, or shelters a homeless ^{woman} ~~person~~, or shows care to a neglected ^{child} ~~person~~. It happens whenever we overturn an

unjust law, or correct an injustice, or avert a war. It happens whenever people join in the struggle to overcome poverty, to erase ignorance^{and}, to pass on the faith.

- The Kingdom of God is in the past (in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth); it is in the present (in the work of the Church and in the efforts of human beings to help create a world of goodness and justice); it is in the future (in its completion and victory in the age to come).
- The Kingdom of God is a condition. Its symptoms are love, justice, and peace. That is the meaning of life.
- The only way to have this meaning ~~in your life~~ is to have God in your life. And the only way to have God in your life is to enter into ^{His} ~~God's~~ kingdom. That is the sovereign and savior we are asked to recognize and accept today.
- For the Christian, then, the question is not: “Am I happy?” but “Is my life meaningful? Have I entered into God’s Kingdom?” By asking that question we do not torture ourselves with someone else’s materialistic ideal of what life should be. Instead, we are accepting God’s vision ^{and} ~~or~~ plan for life.
- We must not ask God to exempt us from the human condition. Life is meaningful precisely when we sense God’s presence in the midst of suffering, sicknesses, loneliness, and pain. Faith should never pressure us to ask God to exempt us from these. Rather faith should allow us to see every reality in life, positive and negative, and understand the meaning in it.
- “Is my life meaningful?” When I ask the question this way the perspective is very different. Now my happiness will no longer

depend upon my never getting sick, or ~~upon~~ my not getting lonely, or ~~upon~~ my never being misunderstood, or ~~upon~~ my never making wrong choices. Life can be frustrating and still be ^{profoundly} ~~very~~ meaningful. We can be lonely, sick, sorrowful about wrong choices, over-worked and unappreciated, staring old age and death in the face and still experience deep meaning.

- Is my faith deep enough so my experience, no matter how painful, makes some sense? Is God with me as I walk through both health and sickness, joy and sorrow, friendship and loneliness, success and failure, youth and age?

- The question about happiness comes after that question. Happiness is a by-product of the answer.

- Have we chosen to enter into the Kingdom of God? (Have we found meaning in our lives?) Is Christ our King?

on this
feast day