

# ‘REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS’

THE EASTER season is a joyful time, and joy is a pervasive theme in the liturgy of the season. There is ecstatic joy, as in the gospel of the third Sunday of Easter. Upon seeing Jesus the disciples were ecstatic: 'The joy of the disciples was so great that they could not believe it and they stood dumbfounded' (Lk 24:40). They were overwhelmed with joy on seeing Jesus again when they thought they had lost him.

There is also a quieter joy, an everyday joy, the joy that makes us an Easter people. Jesus' resurrection changes everything, and we rejoice at what that means for us. We rise with him to new life. Christ is risen to open the way for us to fuller life. The resurrection of Jesus sets the pattern of life for the Christian, the follower of Christ: we are following Christ by dying and rising to fuller life with him.

We have many reasons to live joyful lives. Christ is the light of the world—'light shines in darkness and darkness could not overpower it' (John 1:5). We rejoice at the power of God's love in Christ. God's mercy and forgiveness are causes for our joy. St Paul wrote: 'He loved me and delivered himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). There are no ends to which God will not go for us, and for us to know that is world-changing for us. We feel grounded: 'My God is a fortress and a rock; in Him I am safe'. We are freed from fear, and experience a deep peace. The power of God's love in Christ is cause for our hope, the promise of salvation and safety.

Joy is to characterise all our lives, it is not an experience that is reserved to the Easter season. St Paul tells us to 'Rejoice always' (1 Thess. 5:16). Joy is not a failure to appreciate evil, but a response to it. Our joy

affirms that good is normal and evil is abnormal. Reality is good. Good is more fundamental than evil—good is primary, while evil is 'a privation of due good' (*privatio boni debiti*) as St Thomas Aquinas defined it. Reality is basically good: 'God saw all that he had made and found it very good' (Gen 1: .....). And so we are to rejoice always. Joy is fundamental, greater than the scandal of evil.

John-Henry Newman wrote:

Gloom is no Christian temper; that repentance is not real which has not love in it; that self-chastisement is not acceptable which is not sweetened by faith and cheerfulness. We must live in sunshine, even when we sorrow; we must live in God's presence, we must not shut ourselves up in our own hearts, even when we are reckoning up our past sins... We must look abroad into this fair world which God made 'very good', while we mourn over the evil which Adam brought into it. (Erich Przywara, *The Heart of Newman. A Synthesis* Arranged by Erich Przywara S.J. (San Francisco. Ignatius Press, 1997), p.317.

During the Easter season we are presented with readings that develop the theme of rising with Christ to fuller life. On the fifth Sunday of Easter we hear the Gospel on the vine and the branches and we reflect on Christ the source of life for us. We draw life from him, as branches from the vine. We are to remain in him. Cut off from him we cease to draw life from him, and we wither.

Jesus tells us to make our home in him as he makes his in us. We are to remain in Christ, stay with him, especially by participating in community worship where we are pruned by the word of God, so that we will bear much fruit—that is, we will live fruitful lives, giving thanks to God, following Jesus' way, and being a blessing for others.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor