

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter
May 12, 2019
By Deacon Bill Pitocco

In “The Joy of the Gospel” Pope Francis said this about joy: “I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light, born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” The first reading today tells us that the apostles were filled with joy. Joy is the hallmark of Christianity. Joy is the gift of this Easter season that we’re still celebrating today. The Easter season is 50 days long: it’s as though the Church is reminding us to celebrate. We need those 50 days to allow the joy of Christ’s resurrection to truly sink in.

But think about what Pope Francis said. We all have moments of suffering – and sometimes they seem to last more than 50 days! Joy, however, is possible in every situation, because it comes from the certainty that, when all is said and done, we are infinitely loved. And Jesus tells us that in the gospel today. He says: “I know my sheep and they follow me.” I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.” And then, in one of the most wonderful lines in the Bible, he says: “No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.” Joy, my sisters and brothers is the certainty of

being loved. And we're loved by God himself, whose love cannot change, whose love cannot let us down. Ever. Jesus doesn't promise an easy life. He doesn't say "You will never have problems." And he doesn't promise us success as we understand success. He promises us that no one can take us out of his hand. He is God, he is one with the Father, and in him we are safe. In him we are loved. This is the great lesson the church is teaching us today! Joy is the certainty of being infinitely loved by God. And the greatest purely human example of this infinite love radiates from our common mother Mary!!

Mary gave the gift of life to Jesus – and I'm sure she went through what all earthly moms go through - Now I don't really know what my mother went through giving birth to me and in those first few years of my life other than the stories. I do know what my wife went through as a mother with each of our sons... but I witnessed that through the eyes of a 20 something year old man. Today, I have the blessing of watching my daughter in law as a young mother and I get to watch through these much more understanding eyes, and so when Camille and I got a text and then a call from her the other day, I was able to immediately understand and share in the joy of the moment... We had bought our daughter in law some kind of shoe she wanted for Christmas - she had just had our second grand child on December 8th. Well, last Tuesday, she texted us a picture of her feet with those shoes on them and then facetimed us to share the joy of being able to fit in them for the first time in 5 months!!

I get that joy now but its still once removed... as a man I can not ever experience what earthly mothers experience physiologically – but I can experience the infinite love of mother, the infinite love of our common spiritual mother Mary! Our church knows after the love of God, the Earth presents no higher object of attainment than the love that Mary had for Jesus and for all of Humanity as a mother! Even at the darkest hour of their life together, the moment when almost everyone who had surround Jesus for the past few year had left his side, it was his MOTHER who was at the foot of the cross, unafraid to love her son to the final moment of his life!! Not only was Jesus certain about the infinite love of his Father in heaven but he was also certain about the infinite love of his Mother – a Mother he gave to all of us as a reminder that we are safe on this earth in the hands of Jesus.”

Jesus said that no one can snatch us out of his hand. But we are free to jump out of it. Little by little we can drift away from Him. The cares and concerns of everyday life can get to us. We can get tired and forget why we do what we do. Socrates famously said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Our church, this extraordinary Catholic church of ours takes this universal wisdom and proposes a daily examination of conscience to help us remain in the hands of Christ. It’s part of the Church’s night prayer in the Liturgy of the hour. St Ignatius Loyola told the early Jesuits that even if they omitted all other daily prayer, they must not drop the daily examination of conscience. In light

of that, I'd like to challenge all of us to take on this examination for at least the remaining days of the Easter season... commit to a 5-10 minute conscience exam each night.

Here's the recommendation from the church and for the last 8 years, since about the second year of my diaconate training, what I have been practicing! First of all, I remind myself that I'm in the presence of God. I am His temple. Second, I give thanks to God. I pick a few things from my day that I'm especially grateful for: my family, the weather, the food I've eaten, something that happened at work... Third, I prayerfully review my thoughts and actions from the day. Where was God trying to lead me? How did I respond? Fourth, I go through the day in my mind recalling any sins I may have committed, any people I may have unknowingly hurt and I ask for forgiveness. As you get in the habit of this you will find yourself ahead of those moments and working to make yesterday's woe's into today's Joy's! Fifth, I ask for God's help to grow in his friendship. Taking these steps, taking the 5 to 10 minutes a night to examine your conscience is one of the best ways to stay in Christ's hand, the hand that will lead you through the dark of night and into an everlasting light allowing you to experience the joy and certainty of his infinite love that he promises all of us. Between the humble and contrite heart and the majesty of heaven there are no barriers – the only password is prayer! And as much as prayer is the key to opening the day, the examination of your conscience is the bolt to shut in the night.