

HOMILY

The Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time *February 3, 2008*

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Is there anyone in this world who is truly happy? The great thinker, Samuel Johnson, once wrote a story entitled *Rasselas* in which the main character, an Abyssinian prince, lived on a mountaintop in peace and luxury. He became dissatisfied with his walled-in existence and finally ventured out into the world to search for those persons who are altogether happy. He looked far and wide and to his surprise, he discovered that no such person existed in the world. He returned disillusioned to his home in Abyssinia.

Is anyone in this world truly happy? Certainly we know that many people are unhappy. In the United States, seventy people commit suicide every day and another thousand try it. That is 365,000 people every year who are unhappy enough to try to snuff out their own existence. Put another way, in your lifetime 15 million people in this country will attempt to end their lives.

Is there anybody who is really happy? Today we heard the passage from the Bible called The Sermon on the Mount. It was spoken by Jesus to the crowds who were lingering, hungry for every one of his words. The passage from Matthew, Chapter Five, is called The Beatitudes and instead of saying *blessed*, many translators are saying, *happy*. *Happy* are the poor in spirit. *Happy* those who mourn. *Happy* are the meek. *Happy* the peacemakers. Dr. Schuller calls them the *Be Happy Attitudes*.

Anyway, one by one, as Jesus shared these teachings with the people before him, he wanted to assure them that there were avenues to happiness. Closer to home, we need to not only know about them but you and I need to understand them. We need to make them our own, to take them to heart so that way their attitude becomes our attitude.

When we talk about happiness, let's be aware that happiness does not consist of the pursuit of pleasure. There are those who preach the Gospel of Success...get ahead and get a place in this world. The preachers of the Gospel of Success are wrong. Trust me, happiness does not depend on who you are or what you own or what stuff you have accumulated or where you are in the pecking order. Father Louis Everly, a priest and writer from Belgium, says that so many people never find happiness because they do not know where to look for it. He says that too many people make the mistake of seeking one more material thing, one more pay raise, one more promotion, one more benefit. "If only I had that," they often say, "then I would be happy." Too late they learn that happiness does not come from the outside but from within.

Howard Hughes was one of the richest men that ever lived, but he could not buy contentment or peace of mind. He died the loneliest, unhappiest person in the world. Friends, happiness is not synonymous with the pursuit of pleasure, with how much we own or how much stuff you or I have. So where, then, is happiness to be found?

Happiness is found in purposeful living!

In these simple sayings about blessedness or happiness, Jesus is giving us a picture of a very special kind of people. They are humble people, people of the earth, people who are "truth in packaging," people who are obedient to God, people who know what it is to face tough times and adversity. They are not the passive pious but the completely committed. They are people who live by the power of purposeful living.

I love to read history and recently read about a young soldier in the Civil War who got sick on the battlefield and was taken to the hospital tent. Lying on a cot, he pleaded with the doctor, "Oh, doctor, don't tell me I'm not fit for duty. Don't tell me I can't go back. It's only a touch of the fever, doc, and the sound of the bugle will make me well again." The young soldier had a purpose to live for.

You and I also have a great purpose to live for, a purpose that stretches us beyond this world. A purpose that is so high and noble in goodness that our whole life is enhanced. Happiness is found in giving ourselves to this high and noble purpose.

Happiness is found in being people-oriented!

When Jesus talks in the Beatitudes about being meek and merciful and peaceful and pure in heart, he's suggesting a willingness to give over our desires to the well-being of others. We're not talking about becoming a doormat for others to trample upon. There was a time when Christians believed that **JOY** (or happiness) was spelled "**J**esus first, **O**thers second, and **Y**ourself last." Somehow, that order has been reversed.

Many of you read the cartoon strip *Cathy*. Recently there was quite an impressive conversation between Cathy and Andrea. Cathy says, "When I was little, I put my own needs first and everyone said I was being selfish and inconsiderate. Now, everyone says I'm supposed to put my own needs first." Andrea answers, "That's right, Cathy. Putting your own needs first is one of the most important things you can do to maintain your self-respect." Cathy looks very sad as she asks, "How can I have any self-respect if I'm being selfish and inconsiderate?" Friends, Cathy hit the nail right on the head. Being selfish and inconsiderate is not a way to get self-respect. Being a taker and not a giver is not the way to self-respect. Giving as we want to receive—being for others—is how we find purpose in life. Jesus has been rightfully called "**The** Man for Others." And as he teaches us, happiness is being for others.

Happiness is found by walking with Jesus.

There are many paths which attempt to promise happiness. But I have found the only real path to happiness is by walking the walk with Jesus. And not just on good days but on not so good days. Not just in health, but in sickness. Not just when there is hope, but when there is disappointment, like these challenging times that are really striking at all of us. When we discover that Jesus loves you and loves me and when we discover that we have someone who will never leave us, we have discovered the secret of happiness. And like song No. 603:

*"No storm can shake my in-most calm
While to that rock I'm clinging."*

Cling to Jesus. Walk with Jesus. And, trust me, you'll find happiness deep down.

And so, is there anyone in this world who is truly happy? Yes, there is. Find a person with a humble heart, a purpose for living, a love for people, and a commitment to God. Look closely because you will have found a man or a woman or a child who is happy.

And so, do you want to be happier? This the formula. It's not found in pursuing pleasure. It's found in having something great to live for, in loving other people, and in putting God first in your life.