

Homily for May 12, 2020

The Joy of the Lord

This teenage girl's name is Alexia Gonzalez-Barros:



She died in 1985, but only after achieving remarkable maturity. She was a Spanish girl who had been stricken with cancer at a young age. She accepted her cancer with joy and offered it to God with specific intentions. Her constant prayer was: Jesus, may I always do your will. She had to wear this large metallic brace affixed to her head and neck with screws, and was given medicine that turned her mouth a dark unattractive colour. Despite everything she kept her cheerfulness and good humor throughout. She said to her friends: “First, they made me look like Frankenstein; now I look more like Dracula. She always steered conversation toward her visitors and away from herself. When her doctor brought medical students to observe her, he told them: “I want you to see how to be joyful, despite pain and suffering. Alexia died, transfigured by the grace of God, at the age of 14.

Alexia's joy is indicative of the joy we see on display in the Acts of the Apostles. The Acts of the Apostles is filled with the Joy of the Apostles. Even in today's reading, after Paul had been left for dead, there is a confidence and joy he and Barnabas exhibit as through them the Holy Spirit grows the Church.

I want to think with you now for a couple of minutes about what it means to be filled with joy. For it is this joy the Lord promises to us as well when he invites us in today's Gospel to guard our hearts from being troubled, so that he can extend his peace and joy to us,

Joy and happiness and not the same thing.

The word happy comes from its root "hap" which means by chance or lucky. Joy in the Greek comes from the word "charis" which in English is translated by the word "grace".

Happiness depends on the circumstances of life. Joyful people can be joyful even in the face of great suffering, like Alexia.

Happiness is like the temperature, we cannot control it. When the weather systems change the temperature goes up or the temperature goes down. When things are going well we can be very happy. When things start to go bad we are not.

Joy however is like the thermostat. We can set our hearts on joy and not matter how the weather might change around us we can have a constancy because our lives are not primarily determined by our circumstances.

The Lord in the Last Supper Discourses in John 13-17, exhibits this quality of joy and wants to impart this same joy to the disciples. Jesus knows Joy because he knew he had come to do the Father's will. This is the secret to joy – the same joy Paul and Barnabas knew and a fourteen year-old girl from Spain. Even though facing great challenges, because they knew the will of God, their thermostat was set where it needed to be.

Joyful people, as we see with our Lord, even when they are suffering refuse to condemn, to judge others, and they refuse to fall into self-pity. They understand that to be in the will of God is what matters for the joy of the Lord is their strength.

We know from Galatians 5 that joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we trust that the Holy Spirit is guiding and leading us we can affirm that our lives are in the care and keeping of God. We affirm and trust that God will never abandon us. This is a peace emanating from joy, and not happiness.

The opposite of trust is fear. When we become fearful we think that God has abandoned us. That God will not give us what we need that we won't get through this.

Peaceful people, not matter what they are suffering, no matter what opposition they meet, are still filled with joy because they are trusting in the Holy Spirit and the grace of God truly sustains them. And the Holy Spirit never disappoints. God will give us the grace and the strength we need to endure what he asks.

As we trust in the Holy Spirit let's remember that we are a people of joy for the Lord our God is our strength.