

Faith – Part 3

~ Let us live our Faith joyfully ~

+ Paul Otsuka Yoshinao, Bishop of Kyoto

“Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil.4:4). The joy of faith is a Christian’s greatest gift. It is one of the characteristics of a Christian. In 1987 Japan’s first National Incentive Convention for Evangelization (NICE1) took place in Kyoto and one of its results was a call from the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Japan: “Let us live together with Joy”. They said: “In regard to faith, we would like to change from seeing faith primarily as ‘doctrines and commandments’ to putting the emphasis on ‘living our faith and living it joyfully together’, because a faith that knows God is present with us will be lived among people in the joy of believing Christ’s Gospel”.

Our theme in Kyoto Diocese as we enter into the “Year of Faith” (11th October 2012 ~ 24th November 2013, Feast of Christ the King) will be “Faith – Part 3 The Joy of Faith”. In order to respond with “genuine faith” to God’s call and become “true believers”, let us now verify the “Joy of Faith” in the light of the “Senses of Faith”.

1. The Joy of being loved by God

(A Personal Sense of Faith)

The God of Love created the world and human beings to share his everlasting joy with them. All true joys, from the tiny, unexpected joys of daily life to the more noteworthy ones, all are signs of God’s love. God, who is love itself, is the source of true joy. “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God lives in them” (1 John 4:16).

The joy desired by believers comes from the awareness of being loved by God. The Joy of Faith resulting from this awareness will then be evidence of God’s presence within us. St. Peter says: “Though you have not seen him

(Christ), you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1Peter 1:8). When we accept and believe that God loves all people, we actually experience this “Joy of Faith”.

2. The Joy of knowing God is at our side

(A Discovering Sense of Faith)

The Joy of Faith which we are seeking will be found in Jesus Christ because God’s unlimited love is made known to us in a perfect way in the person of Jesus. That is why St. Paul urges us to “Rejoice in the Lord”. He then gives the reason for this by saying “The Lord is near” (Phil.4:5). The Joy of Faith is the joy of knowing God is at our side.

The person who discovers this and accepts it in faith has nothing to fear in this world. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matt.13:44). When we find God hidden in daily events, nothing can compare with the joy of that discovery, and we cannot let go of it.

3. The Joy of knowing Christ

(A Perceptive Sense of Faith)

“Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me” (John 12:44). Because Jesus and the Father are one (cf. John 10:30), believing in God and believing in Jesus are identical. The joy of Jesus as Son, comes from knowing the Father, and so, he wants us, as God’s children, to be part of this perfect joy that he shares with the Father. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

This means then, that the Joy of Faith for us is in knowing Christ. When Jesus visited Zacchaeus the tax collector who was also regarded by people as a sinner, he was “welcomed gladly” by Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5-6). So too, we who are sinners, know Jesus every day as the friend who loves and forgives us, and the Joy of Faith comes to us from knowing Jesus in this way. This Joy then, begins to transform our whole life radically and becomes the power that brings

salvation.

4. The Joy of 'boasting' in Christ

(A Christological Sense of Faith)

Jesus rejoices because the Father reveals himself to the little ones. "Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do'" (Luke 10:21). Furthermore, Jesus gives up his own life because he accepts the Father's will that he should announce this joy to the little ones (cf. John 15:9-15). The Joy of Faith then, comes to us through the self-offering of Jesus' Passion and Death. That is why St. Paul could speak of his joy in discovering the love of Christ who offered his life on the cross, expressing it as "boasting in Christ". "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Cor.1:31) is actually an expression borrowed from Jer.9:23 and is similar in meaning to Paul's recommendation "Rejoice in the Lord".

5. Joy that touches heart-strings

(A Sacramental Sense of Faith)

The Liturgy is a special place for 'tasting' the Joy of Faith. In the 7 Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, the Sacrament of Forgiveness, the Sacrament of Anointing the sick, Marriage and Holy Orders) we celebrate the grace of God's salvation surrounded by the Joy of Faith. N.I.C.E. 1 expressed it this way: "Liturgy is not merely a duty or a ceremony with rules to be followed, but is, rather, our communion with God who is present with us. It is the place where we experience and share the "Joy of living together", which is why we need to create a liturgy that touches people's heart-strings".

The Sacrament of Penance is the Sacrament that restores the Joy of Faith. "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7). Also, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, we see how God in his deep compassion never rejects any of us. "we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). Our God gives the joy of his love unreservedly to the sinner who returns to him.

6. Joy lived by Giving Love

(A Practical Sense of Faith)

“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor.13:11). The command to “rejoice” is inseparable from the command to “love one another”, and so, the Joy of Faith is present whenever love of God is practiced. God’s love is a Giving love, a love accompanied by sacrifice. Jesus forsook his own joy, and by accepting death on the cross brought us the joy of the Father: “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). We too take up our cross daily in order to practice a life of giving, and in doing so the Joy of Faith becomes authentic within us.

7. The Joy of Salvation

(A Salvific Sense of Faith)

The Joy of Faith is the joy of salvation. On the morning of Christ’s Resurrection when the women went to the tomb where Christ’s body had been laid, they were “afraid yet filled with joy” (Matt.28:8) on hearing the message that Jesus had “risen from the dead” and was living. This was Easter faith in Christ the Savior. The experience of God’s love which is ultimately victorious over evil in our lives, leads the believer to the Joy of Salvation and brings us courage and patience.

Thus St. Paul can say: “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil.3:10-11). Christians, at times, lose this sense of Joy in their Faith amidst life’s many trials, especially when faced with tragic and incomprehensible events, and they are overcome by pain and sorrow. However, even though we cannot feel the Joy of Faith in those situations, we can be sure that the reality of being saved does not change.

8. Joy that shares in Christ's Glory

(A Sense of Faith that brings things together)

Nobody goes through life without feeling some anxiety. The Christian, however, who has made the radical decision to seek after eternal life, will be enabled by faith to assess the anxiety correctly, rather than having to worry unnecessarily about it. Rather than having the anxiety taken away, the Christian can accept it as it is, and get on with life. This is because believers are convinced about God's promise of salvation, knowing that even now God is at work in the world overcoming the power of evil. Believing that God is guiding the world towards its final completion brings hope, because, as Jesus said: "You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20). That is why we can "be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom.12:12).

All of our sufferings can become like St. Paul's when he says "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Col.1:24). We also have St. Peter's words: "Rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13).

9. Joy that trusts in Jesus

(A Critical sense of Faith)

At the present time there are many temptations that prevent people from experiencing the Joy of Faith. One example is the world of the Internet, which draws us into a consumerist way of thinking, inviting us to seek after instant gratification and pleasure, with its hidden danger of presenting the illusion of happiness already at hand. People today are already feeling the emptiness of life even in the midst of material riches and affluence. Having possessions does not bring true joy. St. Paul, the missionary who possessed nothing, was able to be: "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:10).

At the wedding in Cana, Mary was the one who noticed that "they have no more wine" (John 2:3). Wine is a symbol of joy. Because Mary was a person filled with the Joy of Faith she was able to notice the lack of God's gift of joy in

that life-situation. She was able then to act with trust in Jesus who alone could provide true joy. Choosing to trust in Jesus, instead of being seduced by deceptive pleasures which only last a moment, is the way to true and lasting joy.

10. Joy deepened by Communion

(A Community Sense of Faith)

The early Christian communities are described as follows: “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46). The Joy of Faith developed through living in fraternal communion. St. Paul is speaking in the plural sense and not to people individually when he says “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4), and Paul, himself, always shared his joy with the community: “I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me” (Phil.2:17b-18).

We cannot be happy by ourselves when other people are unhappy. St. Paul tells us: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom.12:15), and also “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Whenever we are in close contact with people who are suffering, we can discover God’s mercy in the hearts of people. If we wish to have the Joy of Faith in our hearts, we should proclaim that joy in communion with people and share it with them (cf. 1 John 1:3-4).

11. Joy is the Fruit of the Holy Spirit

(A Spirit-filled Sense of Faith)

“The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom.14:17). The kingdom brought about by Jesus is not about eating and drinking in the ordinary, everyday sense, but rather, it refers to the way interior joy is given to people, living in righteousness and peace under the power of the Holy Spirit, in communion with God and with each other. The fruit of the Spirit is: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal: 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit, who is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, makes us children of God, enabling us to call God ‘Father’ (Abba) and experience God’s

mercy (cf. Rom. 8:15).

Belief is a choice made by human free-will, but without the action of the Holy Spirit it would be impossible to make this decision by human power alone. What makes belief possible is the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts. It is God's own work in us. And so, St. Paul says "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

12. Mary's Canticle of Praise

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). Mary received the Lord into herself, and thus exclaimed her joy of salvation by this song of praise, which is called the Canticle of Mary. When Mary humbly offered her whole life to God in a perfect act of service, she became the first person to proclaim her joy in God's love.

Our mission as Christ's disciples is to show to the world how faith produces true, perfect, lasting happiness and joy. This is what the "Year of Faith" sets out to do. In the midst of the hardships of modern society, many people around us yearn in their hearts to know the Joy of Christianity and our message of Hope. During this "Year of Faith" each of us is being asked to re-discover the joy of believing so that we may become missionaries of the Joy of Faith. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

Note: All direct scripture quotations are taken from NIV (New International Version) Bible.