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St. Scholastica's Priory

Manila

Dear Sisters,

Happy St. Scholastica's Feast and Happy Valentine! What is common to both these feasts is undoubtedly LOVE! I would like to reflect on LOVE as PHILIA- friendship. I think friendship is one of the greatest gifts of God to us. In the past we have been warned so much about "particular friendship" that we hesitate to value this particular form of love. Actually there is no friendship that is not particular. There is no such thing as general friendship. The word friendship connotes some form of intimacy, a certain understanding and an emotional resonance. I would rather use another phrase for objectionable relationship as "exclusive friendship" or "sticky relationship."

If we look into our own experiences, we treasure the affirmation, support, and understanding of our friends. We have friends that date back to our childhood days and they have been with us through thick and thin. That is why I really think that phrase: "for richer or for poorer, in sickness and pain, till death do us part" is more appropriate for the relationship among friends although it is used in the context of marriage. Because as we know married couples can separate, can divorce. And yet, as I said we have friends that we have had all our life and who are with us in all the trials and in our moments of glory. We are very fortunate if we have a friend with whom we can share things we do not dare to share with others, a friend who accepts us for what we are with all our foibles, irritating traits and irascible temperament or moodiness. When I was in Rome and I had to make an extremely important decision, a Sister friend accompanied me in adoration after Compline for a whole week.

In this month of love, let us thank God for the friends who have entered into our lives and into whose life we have likewise entered making our lives beautiful and truly blessed.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

STATIO CONFERENCE

JOY

By: S. Mary Bernard Lansang, OSB

Introduction:

I fondly recall our early days in the convent. Soon after entrance, we were initiated into the monastic culture of **silence** and **reading**. Our Magistra, Sister Assumpta, gave each one of us a book to read. The book given to me was: “*The JOY in Serving God*” by Dom Basil Humphill, OSB. The content of this book shaped my life and it strengthened my decision to serve God as a Benedictine sister. The JOY that I found during the initial years of my formation has remained with me through all the years of my religious life . . . in joy as well as in the small trials and pains that came along the way.

The book is addressed primarily to those consecrated to religious life. Let me quote a portion of the Preface.

JOY is a great value in our life and a powerful help to us . . . JOY, then, should characterize the religious. Joy, as Scripture and the Fathers teach, is the fruit of charity. Because JOY springs from the love of God, the life of a good religious is necessarily joyful. Unless love is at the root of it, our religious life is but an outward show and formalism, lacking in its most essential quality. But since it is the service of Him whom we love, it is **necessarily joyful**.

The first chapter of the book brings the reader to the heart of the matter: CHRIST WITHIN US. Again, I would like to quote some lines:

Our holy religion offers us innumerable causes of deep and abiding joy, joy which no tribulations, however great, can banish, for it is not dependent upon the changing circumstances of our lives. It is a joy which rests upon unshakable foundations:

this is the joy brought about by the fact and the knowledge of the presence of God within us, the indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity in our souls.

Hence, we should frequently **advert to the PRESENCE OF CHRIST WITHIN US**, withdrawing our senses from outward things and, no matter how busy our lives may be, retreating into ourselves wherein is our sanctuary . . . **since therein is our divine Companion, waiting for us to come to Him.** (Nota bene: underlining and bold printing, mine)

JOY in the Scriptures

A couple of days ago, I started gathering materials for my conference. I got the huge book NRSV Exhaustive Concordance: complete and unabridged. My heart leaped for joy when I

opened the page on JOY . . . a long, long list of Scripture texts on JOY (all in all 264 verses) And, the word JOY recurs 40 times in the Book of Psalms. And, moving on to Vespers that same afternoon, I sang with JOY in my heart:

Psalm 21: O Lord, your strength gives JOY to the king*
How your saving help makes him glad.
You have granted your blessings to him for ever
You have made him rejoice with the JOY of your presence.

Psalm 66: Cry out with JOY to God all the earth*
O sing to the glory of His name.

Let our JOY then be in him;/
He rules for ever by his might*
His eyes keep watch over the nations/
Let rebels not rise against him.

Pastoral-Biblical Meaning of Joy

When one goes over the Biblical passages where the word JOY occurs, one gets a deeper understanding of the meaning of joy. JOY is both **God's gift to us and God himself present among us.** Joy is central to the faith experience of God's Kingdom.

In the OLD TESTAMENT:

a) Joy arises from love.

- Joy is portrayed as part of domestic life. It thrives in the love between husband and wife.
 - Proverb 5: 18-23
*Have joy with the wife of your youth.
Her love will invigorate you always.
Through her love, you will flourish continually*
- On the contrary, break-up of marriage results in lack of joy.
 - Jeremiah 7:34 *In the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, I will silence the cry of joy, the cry of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride., for the land will be turned to rubble.*

b) Israel's historians narrate some landmark in their history as a people.

- David's triumph in battle 1 Samuel 18: 13-16 *David led the people on their military expeditions and prospered in all their enterprises for the Lord was with him.*
- Transfer of the ark of the covenant 2 Samuel 6: 13-15
David went to bring the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the City of David amid festivities . . . he sacrificed an ox and a fattling. Then, David girt with a linen apron,

came dancing before the Lord with abandon, as he and all the Israelites were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the sound of the horn.

- Dedication of the Temple. Solomon's Prayer 1 Kings 8: 22-23
*Solomon stood before the Lord in the presence of the whole community of Israel; and stretching forth his hands toward heaven, he said "**Lord God, there is no God like you, in heaven above or earth below; you keep your covenant of kindness with your servants who are faithful to you with their whole heart. . .**"*

All the above historical accounts show to us how JOY comes to us

- when we recognize God's presence among us like David fighting his battles on the strength of the Lord
- when we acclaim God with praise and thanksgiving like David dancing before the ark
- when we recognize the power of God in all our accomplishments and dedicate all our projects to the glory of the Lord like Solomon

In the NEW TESTAMENT

JOY in the Person of JESUS.

I will concentrate only on two Gospel passages that can help us see JOY in the heart of Jesus.

- Luke 10: 17-20
Luke's account of the missioning and the return of the Seventy and the revelatory discourse of Jesus followed by his Prayer of thanks to the Father reveals to us JOY in the life of Jesus and the wellspring of this joy.

Coming from their mission, the Seventy gave Jesus an account of their mission rejoicing in their accomplishment.

The Seventy: *"Lord, even the devils submit to us when we use your name."*

Jesus answered: *"I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread underfoot serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. **Yet, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.**"*

Jesus' answer to the disciples does not make too much or too little of the success of the disciples. Rather, he wants to set their mission into the larger frame of God's reign.

Jesus warns the Seventy that triumphalism is an inappropriate spirit among disciples. Our joy as missionaries should be, not that we have certain gifts and powers but that God has received us and accepted us and that *"our names are written in heaven."*

- Luke 10: 21-24 Jesus' Prayer of Thanks and Blessings

It was then, filled with JOY by the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father and no one knows who the Son is except the Father and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

I would like to underline that this JOY of Jesus welled up from the Holy Spirit that was dwelling in him. Prompted by the same Spirit, Jesus thanked the Father for revealing Himself not to the clever nor the wise but to the weak and the little ones.

In this episode, Jesus shares with the Seventy his vision of the final victory now begun. He warns his disciples against triumphalism and self-congratulation. He breaks into an inspired prayer in thanksgiving to the Father. He turns to his disciples with a blessing which reminds them of God’s favor on them.

Jesus opened his heart to his apostles at the Farewell Discourse.

- John 15: 9 *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.*
- John 15: 11 *These things I have spoken to you that my JOY may be in you and that your JOY may be full.*

These two verses in the Last Discourse open to us a deeper understanding of the JOY that comes to us from Jesus: a JOY that wells up from His heart. Jesus’ LOVE from us arises from the LOVE that he receives from the Father.

Jesus’ words on his love for us help us understand our CAPACITY TO LOVE. A person can love only if the person herself has been loved. Someone who has not been loved is in danger of seeking “affirmation,” “support,” “caring,” “sharing.”

Jesus declared his love for his followers and that his love is rooted in the Father’s love for him. If we believe in God’s love for us, then we will see our life as a GIFT from God. All that we are and all that we have is a GIFT from God. Jesus, in talking about his love for his followers says, *“These things I have spoken to you that my JOY may be in You and your JOY may be complete.*

JOY in GOD’s Presence

As Jesus was assuring the apostles of God’s LOVE he said *“Abide in my love.”* This, then, is the source of our JOY: God’s abiding presence among us. This is the dynamics of the beginnings of the seeking and longing heart: **Our hearts long for God; “and God moves towards us in the embrace of love.”**

A very moving part of Jesus’ farewell discourse was when he told his disciples: *You are sad . . . because I am going away . . . but I will send you the Advocate, the Holy Spirit . . . and he will tell you all things.* Henri Nouwen says it in these words: When Jesus sent his Holy Spirit, God was revealed to us as the God within us, our very breath and heart beat.

Charles Ringma wrote a book, "The Seeking Heart, A Journey with Henri Nouwen." He writes about the varying circumstances when the human heart starts seeking God:

- A profound sense of aloneness. In the solitude of aloneness and in the depths of loneliness, the seeking heart can discover the God who takes us and draws us to his loving heart.
- For others, a sense of guilt and shame drives them to look for God's redemptive presence
- And still others, a sense of powerlessness and failure drives them to seek the God who empowers and liberates his people.

There can be many other ways by which the heart is moved to seek God; and what is so consoling is the fact that when God responds to the seeking heart, he comes not just to say hello and goodbye. God comes to stay. When Christ says, "Abide in me" he invites us to make our home in the Blessed Trinity, indwelling in our hearts. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit make their home within our being. This, then, is the WELLSPRING OF OUR JOY.

Hearts Singing for JOY

One of the Invitatory Psalms that I like singing is Psalm 8 (sung on ferial days) "***Come, let us sing JOYFUL SONGS to the Lord***" The melody is so inviting, so playful, and so joyful . . . it reminds me of childhood days when we would run through rice paddies to go to a small farm where we could harvest peanuts and camote. To another person, this melody can be like an invitation to dance or to play. Joyce Rupp, in her book, "May I Have this Dance?" has a joy-filled chapter, "***The Playground of God.***" She quotes Zephaniah 3:18

God will rejoice over you with happy song. . .
God will dance with shouts of JOY for you
As on a day of festival.

She writes about God who dances with shouts of joy . . . God as someone who laughs and enjoys life. Meditating on God dancing for joy can help us discover ways of keeping JOY ALIVE IN US!

Gazing at the stars and the moon at night or looking at the green grass and the trees surrounding us can lift up our hearts in joy.

Joyce Rupp says:

There is gusto, passion, and enthusiasm in this dimension of God, a sense of awe, wonder, and delight.

I tell people over and over again that I found joy in feeding lizards on the palm of my hands. Also, I enjoyed helping in the kitchen, removing the skin of frogs that were prepared for cooking . . . I believe that recalling our sense of awe and wonder as children can bring back to us the joys of childhood.

Joyce Rupp talks about keeping alive "***the inner child***" in us. She recalls how Jesus took the children on his lap. The indignant apostles wanted to drive the children away but Jesus said, "***Let the little children come to me for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.***"

What makes us lose the inner child in us?

- Our desire to excel, to compete, to be above the others, to seek positions in the community or in the school
- Our grating desire to acquire the best things in the world of consumerism: the most modern cellphone, the latest model in computers and lap top . . .
- The pages of commercials in the daily papers can give us the desire to go to the big super marts to get what suits our taste, our need for luxury items . . .

How do we recover the inner child in us?

Pema Chodron, an American Buddhist nun, wrote a book: “TAKING the LEAP: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears” She has a chapter entitled: Rejoicing in Things as They Are.

When we begin to see clearly what we do, how we get hooked and swept away by old habits, our usual tendency is to use that as a reason to get discouraged, a reason to feel really bad about ourselves. Instead we could realize how remarkable it is to see ourselves honestly and that doing this takes courage. It is moving in the direction of seeing our life as a teacher not as a burden. This involves learning to stay present, learning to stay with a sense of humor, learning to stay with loving kindness toward ourselves and the outer situation, learning to take JOY in the magic ingredient of honest self-reflection.

Yes, it is when we have the courage and humility to accept our weaknesses and our personal limitations that we become more understanding towards others, more accepting of the limitations of our sisters in community. When we face ourselves and our limitations with a sense of humor, then, JOY comes into our life.

SERVING THE LORD WITH JOY

When we are able to accept ourselves, our goodness, our beautiful traits as well as our limitations; when we are at peace with ourselves and with the sisters in our community, then we can sit in quiet contemplation. We are at home with God. We can be content simply to look upon God and to have God look upon us with great love.

God called us to a life totally given to His service and the service of His people. Ours is the Challenge to proclaim his love to all! We are called to live this life of service with JOY. Thomas Merton says,

“Keep your eyes open, your heart at peace,
And your soul in the JOY of Christ.”

And, our Constitutions tell us:

When we live in Love, JOY, and Peace,
we give witness to our God
who call us all to community with Him and with one another

That in all things GOD may be glorified!

Guide for Prayer and Reflection

1. Recall happy days in your life especially childhood days. Recall the joys you had in the family. Thank God for these beautiful gifts you received from him.
2. Get in touch with your inner self: your limitations, your weaknesses, your desire to achieve, your need to be on top. Ask the Lord for the grace to accept your limitations and beg him to heal you of these desires that rob you of JOY.

Guide for Sharing

Share with your group your experience of the inner child in the past: your sense of awe and wonder. What brought you JOY?

Then, share how you want to recapture this inner child. How do you nurture deep JOY within you and how do you want to give JOY to others?

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CRISIS FATIGUE AND THE CO-CREATION OF POSITIVE POSSIBILITIES

by Tom Atlee

A letter to a community organizer and networker overwhelmed by the potential impact of global crises on his community.

Dear John,

You might consider something I'm thinking of calling crisis-fatigue. Like battle fatigue or compassion fatigue. I think its main ingredient is ambiguity-fatigue. It is exhausting to continually contemplate potential massive threats from a place of radical uncertainty littered with certainties that blink on and off...

How does one respond to this in anything approaching a sane way? I struggle with this all the time. At least a few things have become obvious to me. These strategies are remarkably consistent with what you'd expect the requisites would be for living in a complex, chaotic, unpredictable system:

- 1) Let go of outcome. Since we're not in charge (and never really were), admit that what happens is much bigger than any of us. It seems we need to be willing to die, willing for everyone around us to suffer, willing to fail at every attempt to make the world better or to understand or to be understood, or to even grow and learn from all this. Let it all go. (I do not mean that we should expect, encourage or welcome such undesirable outcomes. I mean we can want or envision positive outcomes even as we appreciate the fullness of life with or without them. Honoring our desires without being controlled by them clarifies our minds and frees us to be fully present. I know of few forces more powerfully benign than passionate engagement without attachment.)
- 2) Come to terms with our own intrinsic participation in Whatever Happens. Not only are we not in control, we're not un-involved. Our role in Whatever Happens isn't something we can escape. (One consolation is we aren't alone. Everyone and everything is co-creating Whatever Happens.) This is hard for us to come to terms with because it looks so much like the guilt-based responsibility upon which our society is based ("Everything is not my fault!"); but it is a totally different thing.

Guilt-based responsibility is part of the linear cause-and effect worldview. ("Who's responsible / guilty / blameworthy?" is the social equivalent of the scientists' question, "What's the cause?") But blame can't fathom the complexity of What Happens in a living/chaotic system. Phenomena arise from the whole, from the system itself. Those who stand by when events happen are creating a context for those events to unfold

in the way they do – even when they are miles away obliviously watching a sitcom. Even inanimate objects are participants: Roads are participating in the death of pollinators (by replacing trees and meadows, by enabling the transport of pesticides, by contributing to ozone depletion). Everything participates. It is pointless to point. The route to better conditions is through increased awareness of the whole, and a more radically expansive sense of all our roles. This includes the previous item – letting go – because co-creation means we were not in charge of outcomes, we’re just vitally important participants in influencing them.

- 3) Look for positive possibilities and ways to partner them into greater probability. Meg Wheatley and David Spangler taught me about living in a world of possibilities. We could say, inspired by the poet Muriel Rukeyser, that the universe is made of possibilities, not atoms. They are everywhere. They are everything. Some say God (or the devil) is in the details. I say God (and the devil) is in the possibilities. Every moment is filled with them. Although we don’t get to control how they turn out, they are very responsive to our actions, our beliefs, our caring. That is the edge of co-creativity where Life resides most vividly.

Some say it is narcissistic to think we are playing a role in everything. This is true if we’re talking about a linear world of cause-and-effect responsibility. But I see reality as bigger than linear. I see it as an infinite, infinitesimally dense web of co-creation, a sea of mutual participation. Spangler has called this “a co-incarnational universe” – everything is bringing everything else into existence.

So we join with everyone and everything – past, present and future – in sharing influence on what happens. We are neither guilty nor innocent. Rather, we are consciously or unconsciously involved. In everything. Our actions matter. Our awareness matters. Right here and right now. Because we are a factor in the Life of Everything.

This ultimate application of the admonition “Think Globally, Act Locally” points towards what we might call “participatory responsibility.” Are we playing the best role we can imagine, given the limits of (our infinitely expandable) awareness?

I think this is what I am asked to do: To care about the larger whole and all the Life within it, and to act in my own life with the purest awareness and intention that I can muster towards being a worthy participant in the unfolding of positive possibilities for all, for the whole. Of course, I fail at this, over and over. And within those failures are more positive possibilities for me to find and engage...

So I look for the positive possibilities in the crises we face. On the one hand, I sometimes feel that our chances are slim and that ultimately it is only by the grace of God that “we will make it” (whatever that means to each of us). On the other hand, I realize how much we often undermine our chances by losing touch with our intrinsically co-creative role in the unfolding of every one of these potential crises, in the fate of the possibilities that are there. That role includes inspiring each other, evoking our best selves, calling forth the best possibilities no matter how small that is the essence of participatory leadership. We can each do that – for ourselves, for each other, for the world.

Faced with a wall, a man said to his comrade,
“We can go no further.” His comrade said,
“But there is crack in the wall.” The man said,
“But the wall is so large and the crack is so small.”
To which his comrade said, “A crowbar in the crack,
and we’ll be on our way. Or set a few seeds in it,
and they’ll take that wall down for us in God’s good time.
Which shall it be?” They were soon on their way.

We are the faces and fingers and feet of the God of Possibility. It is through our participation – although not only through our participation – that God (or the Goddess, or the Tao, or Life) works wonders.

This is easy to visualize if we remember that it is through our hands, but not only through our hands, that we work our won wonders.

Our efforts and caring – even when we “fail” – provide a changed context for the efforts and caring of others elsewhere, tomorrow. The Whole evolves through our roles, through the active being of each and every one of us.

This is;

- bigger than taking personal responsibility,
- bigger than letting others take care of us,
- bigger than taking care of each other,
- bigger than setting up institutions to care for people,
- bigger than realizing the role of history and environment and culture in how we all behave,
- bigger than knowing that inaction and action are both forms of participation,
- bigger than being aware of the upside and downside of every form of participation (and taking action anyway).

It is each and every one of these things, and more. It is all true. It is all real. But it is only possible to enter this Reality to the extent we let go of outcome and become more compassionate, eager, aware agents of Positive Possibility.

So what is possible here in these emerging crises for us, for those we love for our communities, our societies, our world? Do the chances look slim? Do the outcomes seem impossible to grasp? Often they do. But isn't that what makes life an adventure?

Some people say that's why we stay alive, from day to day: to find out what happens next. All games and adventures are built out of uncertainty (if we knew what would happen, we'd soon lose interest). Humans thrive on challenge, on the unknown.

True, we can have too much challenge, too much uncertainty. However, if we look closely, we'll find that that only happens when we've become too attached to outcomes. In the moment of that realization, our challenge becomes "How well can we learn to let go and stay engaged?" That's a real trick. The real trick.

To be alive is to find out what's possible, to see how far we can push/cajole/invite the flow of reality into the channels of positive possibility.

Which is often hard. I want to see a better, more sustainable, more humane, more meaningful culture. I have often felt that we don't have much of a chance of getting it. Too often, the more I learned, the more the social and psychological dynamics seemed stacked against us. And then I'd encounter a new innovation, some unexpected allies, or a sudden turn of events that opened doors I didn't even know existed.

I've come to believe that things are getting better and better and worse and worse, faster and faster, simultaneously.

And so I've found myself bouncing back and forth between optimism and pessimism. "Things are going to work out well." Or: "There's going to be real disaster!" It's been really exhausting.

But lately something's changing about all this. I've begun to notice how the whole optimism/pessimism dichotomy is a death trap for my aliveness and attention. I watch myself acting as if my sense of what might happen is a description of reality. And what I notice is this: whether I expect the best or the worst, my expectations interfere with my will to act.

That's so important I'm going to repeat it. Whether I expect the best or the worst, my expectations interfere with my will to act.

I've started viewing both optimism and pessimism as spectator sports, as forms of disengagement masquerading as involvement. Both optimism and pessimism trick me

into judging life and betting on the odds, rather than diving into life with my whole self, with my full co-creative energy. I think the emerging crises call us to transcend such false end-games like optimism and pessimism. I think they call us to act like a spiritually healthy person who has just learned they have heart disease: We can use each dire prognosis as a stimulant for reaching more deeply into life and co-creating positive change.

And so I've come to conclude that all the predictions – both good and bad – tell us absolutely nothing about what is possible. Trends and events only relate to what is probable. Probabilities are abstractions. Possibilities are the stuff of life, visions to act upon, doors to walk through. Pessimism and Optimism are both distractions from living life fully.

More and more, I'm seeing myself as an ally or midwife of positive possibilities. Those possibilities need me to help them move towards becoming real. True, we often need miracles, but miracles can only go so far. Miracles need us to meet them halfway. I'm trying to move as far towards the miracles as I can, and draw them out.

I'll probably never know if I've moved far enough, if we have moved far enough. But the movement, itself, is so alive I can hardly stand it. And I keep meeting incredible companions like you (whose value to me evoked this response), and doing unbelievable things together. The world could not be more filled with possibilities than it is now. On the wind I smell good food cooking out there somewhere. My appetite for what could be lifts me to the road again, over and over, where I get covered with dust, tired, sore and discouraged. And then I smell it again, and the sun rises.