

Homily
6th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 16-17, 2019

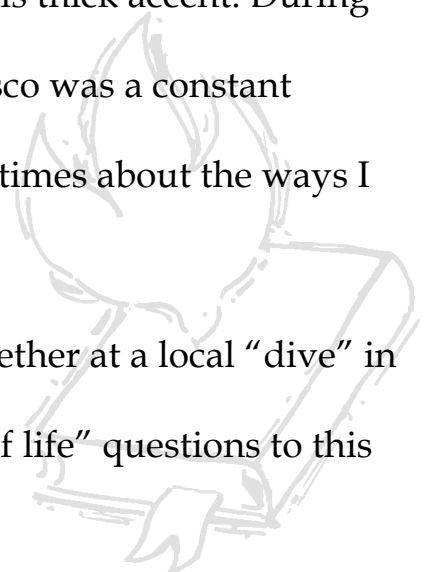
Jer 17: 5-8
Ps 1: 1-2, 3, 4, 6
1 Cor 15: 12 - 16: 20
Lk 6: 17, 20-26

Are you happy?

The inspiration for this week's homily comes from a priest friend of mine who was born in India and, until a few years ago, had been helping out parishes in the Joliet Diocese for almost a decade. His name is Fr. John Bosco Panakal, a priest from the Archdiocese of Verapoly, India (located on the southwest tip of the country, bordering the Arabian Sea), who died recently and whose brother Thompson Panakal once served as Associate Pastor of St. Dennis' Church in Lockport.

I had always found Fr. John Bosco's homilies to be inspirational for me, though it often took me bit to get through his thick accent. During my difficult days in the priesthood, Fr. John Bosco was a constant support, even when he challenged me a couple times about the ways I could improve my life of prayer and ministry.

Many years ago, we were sharing a meal together at a local "dive" in Winfield when I posed one of those "meaning of life" questions to this



priest from India. I asked him very simply, “John Bosco, *are you happy?*” The first time I asked this question, he flippantly replied, saying, “are any of us *really happy* in our lives?” I thought to myself that his response was quite depressing. I think to myself that happiness is one of those benchmarks that human beings try to achieve in life, as if they could enter a Norman Rockwell painting in order to find peace. Some people try to achieve this state of life by earning lots of money. Others attempt to do the same by building a family or even taking a good job as a means to a happy end. So for so many years of my priesthood, I often asked Fr. John Bosco the same question over and over again as a joke, just to see if his response would ever change (really, I keep asking the same question over and over just to drive him nuts). But time in and time out, John Bosco gave me the same stock response that pretty much accompanied his priesthood: *Are any of us really happy in our lives?*

The fact is, happiness is one of those tricky things that is hard for any of us to achieve in life. Webster’s Dictionary defines happiness as a state of contentment or good-fortune, joy, satisfaction, or being pleased (La felicidad como estado de satisfacción o de buena fortuna, alegría,

satisfacción o complacencia). As I reflect on my own life, I can think about *moments* that have been truly happy – the day of my ordination, the birth of my brother, the first time I walked into *The Old Country Buffet*. But all those moments are fleeting and as society has shown, happiness on earth becomes very hard to maintain during the long-haul without a great deal of difficulty and a lot of hard work. The fact is, our spouses will not live forever, few make enough money to satisfy their hedonistic desires (as if money were the main purpose of our lives anyway), our jobs will probably outlive us all and all these things and more will remind us that happiness is but a series of fleeting moments in our journey of life.

Now this all might seem to be a very depressing subject for a homily until we realize that our goal in the world of faith never resided in being happy in the first place. As we read in our gospels, the key to life rests on the gift of humility, a gift that we embrace whenever we love God and our neighbor with our whole heart, mind, and soul, a lifestyle that depends on us doing more for others than for them doing for us. In a sense, our goal in life is to love *others* with all our hearts and the feeling

that accompanies this total self-giving. To watch a spouse or kid or co-worker light up when we share and live the gospel message of love with them is more precious than any fleeting moment of happiness that we can attain for ourselves. As St. Francis of Assisi once told us in his famous prayer from the 1500s, “it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

For it is this self-giving that connects us with the divine presence and a spiritual happiness not equaled on earth, a type of happiness only found in the way we imitate the same love that our Lord presents to us in the most infinite of ways. It is when we give of ourselves that we begin to contemplate and comprehend who God is and what God has done for us (*God in se and God per se, so to speak*). It is through this life of love that we connect to love itself. *That* is what brings us peace in our life; the kind of spiritual happiness that God wishes us to seek is something that Mother Church might call the eternal Sabbath Rest, or the peace found in heaven and in our lives. (For as St. Thomas Aquinas

once wrote, “God is man’s beatitude” – when we live a blessed life, we live like God.)

This passage from today’s gospel is called “The Lukan Beatitudes.” The beatitudes in Luke are similar to the one found in Matthew’s gospel, save two differences. In Matthew’s gospel, the intention was to show eight ways in which the Christian can persevere by living the gospel message; Luke reduces the list to four. In Luke’s gospel, the author parallels the four good beatitudes with their evil counterparts; Matthew provides no evil counterparts in his text.

In today’s gospel from Luke, Jesus specifically tells us that society’s perspective on happiness produces the *opposite* effect on our faith lives than we should expect. Luke’s gospel calls happiness a vice, though we might often see it as a virtue. In Luke’s perspective, any hedonistic act that puts our needs in front of another’s is considered gravely sinful. Luke, in fact, does not limit these vices just to just happiness. In today’s reading, we hear the Lukan version of Jesus speak about four vices that turn us away from God, vices that we sometimes confuse as virtues:

happiness, popularity, being full and being rich, all for the sake of self-satisfaction.

The question we pose to ourselves is whether we wish to be poor, hungry, persecuted and weeping through the life of humility that will lead us to this eternal Sabbath rest, or whether we wish to be rich, full, popular and happy, vices that will lead us nowhere near the kingdom of God. If I asked any person in this congregation, including myself, which of those two paths that most in society would follow, I suspect that most would answer the question in the same way. And this view would be wrong, according to the will of God.

For the Lukan Jesus, the way to the kingdom of heaven rests not on the fulfillment of our own needs, but rather on the needs of others. When we sacrifice our own needs to care for others, the Lukan Jesus calls us *blessed people who are poor in spirit*. When we share and give of our resources to others while forsaking our own desires, *we are blessed because we are hungry*. When we share in the grief of those who suffer and assist and comfort them during their time of pain, *we are blessed because we are weeping*. And when we defend the Catholic faith

knowing that society will persecute us for what we believe, *we are blessed because we are persecuted.*

Once we realize that everything we have, that we own and that we do is a gift from the Lord, then we realize that the gift of love, which is not always easy, is the means by which we can spend the rest of our existence with the one who created us. I do not think that Christ desires us to live a miserable existence. I do believe that Christ wants us to find peace of life by imitating his example, by using our time, talents, and financial resources to assist those who are less fortunate, as Christ has modeled for us throughout Luke's Gospel.

So the question I ask all of you today is the one I constantly posed to Fr. John Bosco: Are you happy? Or, do you choose to be poor in spirit, to live a life of humility, which offers a type of love and a presence of the Lord that happiness will never provide?

Maybe Francis of Assisi was right in the prayer that he offered us and in the extreme poor lifestyle that he chose to live. Maybe today is the day that we offer ourselves to the world for the sake of nothing else than self-giving. Let us take the words of St. Francis and use them as a means

to enlighten the message of our gospel reading today, a message of love that transcends all other types of happiness we can experience on earth.

St. Francis prays,

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This is our prayer.

Señor, haz de mí un instrumento de tu paz.
Que donde haya odio, ponga yo amor.
Que donde haya ofensa ponga yo perdón.
Que donde haya discordia, ponga yo unión.
Que donde haya error, ponga yo verdad.
Que donde haya duda, ponga yo fe.
Que donde haya desesperación, ponga yo esperanza.
Que donde haya tinieblas, ponga yo luz.
Que donde haya tristeza, ponga yo alegría.

Que no me empeñe tanto en ser consolado como en consolar,
en ser comprendido, como en comprender,
en ser amado, como en amar;
pues dando se recibe, olvidando se encuentra;
perdonando se es perdonado,
muriendo se resucita a la vida eterna.

Este es nuestra oración.