

Sixth Sunday of Easter A - If we are true to Christ, He will always be the source of our joy.
May 17, 2020

On the Sixth Sunday of Easter, we're reminded not only of all the reasons for our hope but the need to share those reasons with others as well. The Easter season has two weeks to go, and just as Our Lord ascended and left his disciples to continue his work, we have to be ready for the return to the not so ordinary "Ordinary Time" that should be no less characterized by hope. This Sunday's readings speak about joy. There is the joy that new Christians in Samaria had after Philip baptized them. There is the joy that St. Peter tells us is the reason for our hope. There is the joy that Jesus says comes from the Love of the Father. We Christians are truly eternal optimists. We may be dying of cancer, we may be in difficult family situations, strained relationships, financially hurting, now the coronavirus pandemic, but no matter what the situation, we know that **if we are true to Christ, He will always be the source of our joy.** As St. Gianna Beretta Molla said: *"The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for what he is sending us every day in his goodness."*

In the First Reading (Acts 8:5-8, 14-17), as a result of the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, Christians were scattered but not deterred from evangelizing. Deacon Philip left Jerusalem and worked in Samaria. Like Our Lord, he preached, performed signs, cast out unclean spirits and paved the way for his listeners to be baptized. The Apostles had remained in Jerusalem, despite the persecution, but when they heard of the work Philip had been doing in Samaria, they knew they had something to give as well: the Holy Spirit. Even today we don't just receive Baptism; we receive the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation. Baptism expels evil from us and distances us from evil influences, and Confirmation strengthens us to go out and share the Gospel with others.

In the Second Reading (1 Peter 3:15-18) St. Peter reminds us that we must always be ready to share the reasons for our hope with others. Yes, Peter who tried to walk on water but nearly drowned because he lost faith, who denied the Lord three times. But Peter repented, he wanted to do better; he wanted to serve Jesus. Eventually, through God's grace, he conquered his fears; he controlled his emotions; he became the first Vicar of Christ. Like Peter, we have received new life in Christ. It's our duty to give others the opportunity to receive new life in Christ as well by showing in our lifestyle that hope has transformed us and sustained us. We have a reason for hope. That reason is Jesus Christ. He loves us more than we can possibly imagine. He is not concerned with whether we produce the perfect result. He is overjoyed simply in that we are trying to be the best people we can be in His company.

In the Gospel (John 14:15-21), our Lord prepares the disciples, and us, for Pentecost. He may be ascending soon, but the Holy Spirit is coming in full force. The Lord, after the Ascension, is only seen by those who have faith. The world had its chance, but without faith, it was only a matter of time before they lost sight of Our Lord. After Calvary, as far as they were concerned, Jesus was gone. The Risen Christ appeared to those who believed in him. The Holy Spirit didn't just come to us at Pentecost. This Sunday's words, spoken in the Last Supper, reminded the first disciples, and us, that the Spirit is always with us. Thanks to the Spirit we are never alone and even now, through the Spirit, we maintain communion with the Father and the Son. **The love of God is the greatest reason for our hope, and the greatest way we can reciprocate that love is to obey Christ out of love.**

We are at the end of this very strange school year. Normally this would be the graduating season, but big commencement ceremonies will probably not take place. Still, the young people preparing to move on to high school, or to college or to start their careers are full of enthusiasm. The basic attitude of most of our children, teens and young adults is a mixture of happiness, excitement, and unlimited potential. It is all infectious. We see them and know that the world will progress as long as the young keep their enthusiasm for life. They give us hope. Life is beautiful. Just look at these beautiful young people about to take life by its horns. They know that their dreams will come at the price of hard work, and they are ready for it. But their enthusiasm for life will drain and our bright lights will become dark unless the young and unless we all keep our focus on the reason for our hope, Jesus Christ. How can we do this? With all the distractions in life, especially in the midst of the pandemic and flooding, how do we keep our Christian focus? We do this by dedicating ourselves to truth and avoiding telling lies and living a lie. Living the truth means living an authentic life. When we focus on ourselves and making self-gratification the goal of our lives, we are living a lie. When we focus on sacrificial love, we are living a genuine, true life. **When we commit ourselves to the sacrificial love of the Lord, we are living the profound Truth that happiness comes from Him alone.**

I am not a musician but I love classical music. Beethoven's **Symphony No. 6 in F Major, the Pastoral Symphony** is the first symphony I heard when in high school. It begins with *Awakening of Cheerful Feelings on Arriving in the Country*, the 1st Movement, sets an idyllic mood with people being led joyfully to their dreamland where children can run free, where people can dance with joy, where there is a river providing nutrients for food. The 2nd movement is *Scene By the Brook*, in this case, a gentle brook frequented by quails, cuckoos, and nightingales, whose voices are evoked by the woodwinds: oboe, clarinet, and flute, respectively. The 3rd movement has human inspiration, with a *Merry Gathering of the Country Folk*. But like all merry-making, this party soon comes to an end, in this case, with a change in the weather, as the 4th movement, *Thunderstorm, arrives*. The storm rages away throughout the orchestra, though especially with the full brass and percussion. Eventually, praise the Lord, storm finally subsides with the beginning of the 5th movement, *Shepherd's Song —Happy, Thankful Feelings after the Storm*. This theme gradually grows to become a serene and rapturous melody, the entire symphony ending on a peaceful, unworried, and joyful note. The whole symphony gives me the image of my life: in all the ups and downs, the good shepherd is always by my side. I feel joyful in the midst of the sufferings because I have faith in the merciful Lord: I had found the truth, and is rewarded by a joyful heart overflowing with God's grace.