Living Joy! Reflection, Week 1 (April 19)
By Janet Jones

As Christians, the Good News of Christ should bring us great JOY - especially during this Easter season, but really all year long. Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song! We proclaim that by Christ’s death and resurrection, we have been set free! We should be the most JOY-filled people! But who can honestly say they are living a JOY-filled life? Maybe some of you reading this can say yes, and that is awesome. Hold onto the ONE who gives you the gift of joy!

I, however, have questioned this concept of JOY. It started when I read from Pope Francis’s first apostolic exhortation, The Joy of the Gospel. In the beginning, he states: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. (1)” A couple more statements caught my attention: “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. (6)” and “Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent, this is because our “technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy (7)”. The question I asked myself at the time was: Am I filled with Jesus and His JOY, or am I filled with something else? Am I waiting for something to happen to be JOY-filled, or can I find JOY in the present moment, however the moment presents itself? A personal journey began to discover and uncover the JOY that lies hidden within me and to accept this gift from God. The journey led me to a book called Living Joy: 9 Rules to Help You Rediscover and Live Joy Every Day by Chris Stefanick. The rules are so simple! I will present them over the next few weeks through the Monday reflections. We are meeting on Monday evenings, and you can join us in our weekly Zoom discussion. (Contact Kathy Ahearn kathyahearn@gmail.com for info).

Here’s what you need to know to get started: Jesus promised us JOY! “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (John 15: 9-11) He also promised that, “Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:22)

The second thing to know and that Chris points out, “Joy isn’t a luxury. It’s a necessity. Every human heart is born looking for it. And every heart is powered by it.” (Stefanick, Chris. Living Joy: 9 Rules to Help You Rediscover and Live Joy Every Day, p. 9. Kindle Edition.). We want joy. We were made for joy! And every decision we make, good and bad, is powered by this desire for joy.

Joy is more than a feeling. As Chris explains, “Joy isn’t just the feeling of contentedness that comes from the battle being over. It’s the strength to enter the fight in the first place. If your life is a car, joy is the gas. If your life is a battle, joy is your sword and shield.” (IBID, p. 10)
Why is joy so important? “When you live a life fueled by joy, you become an unstoppable force.” (IBID, p. 11) We are called to be Easter people! JOY is contagious. Imagine the world if everyone was JOY-filled! Imagine yourself! I can speak from experience that being JOY-filled makes my life and everything around me come alive.

But can you be joyful during a global pandemic, with so much division in our country and even in our church? I say YES! Because God has not left us. The pandemic and events within our country have made me realize that I have little to no control over what goes on in the world. My sphere of influence is very small. But I do have control over how I perceive these events. Being JOY-filled is not some Pollyanna way to look at the world. No – because the world is horribly broken. But it’s looking to the Jesus lifted high on the cross – and proclaiming- that Jesus has overcome the world. It’s looking at the empty grave and proclaiming that Christ is risen. Death and sin do not have the last word. Life, love, and resurrection win! That is cause for our JOY!

As Christians, JOY should be our constant companion! I invite you to reflect on these questions:

- Who is the most joyful person you know?
- Would you define yourself as a “JOY-filled” person?
- Fill in this sentence: I’ll be __________ when ______________ happens. Or are you able to find JOY in any present moment?
- What do you let steal your joy?

Join me in praying this prayer for JOY:

Heavenly Father, I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will declare all your wondrous deeds.
I will delight and rejoice in you; I will sing hymns to your name, Most High.
You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever. I trust in your faithfulness.
Grant my heart joy in your help, that I may sing of the LORD, “How good our God has been to me!”
Father, help me to remain in your love. So that your joy may be in me and my joy may be complete.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.