

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 15, 2019

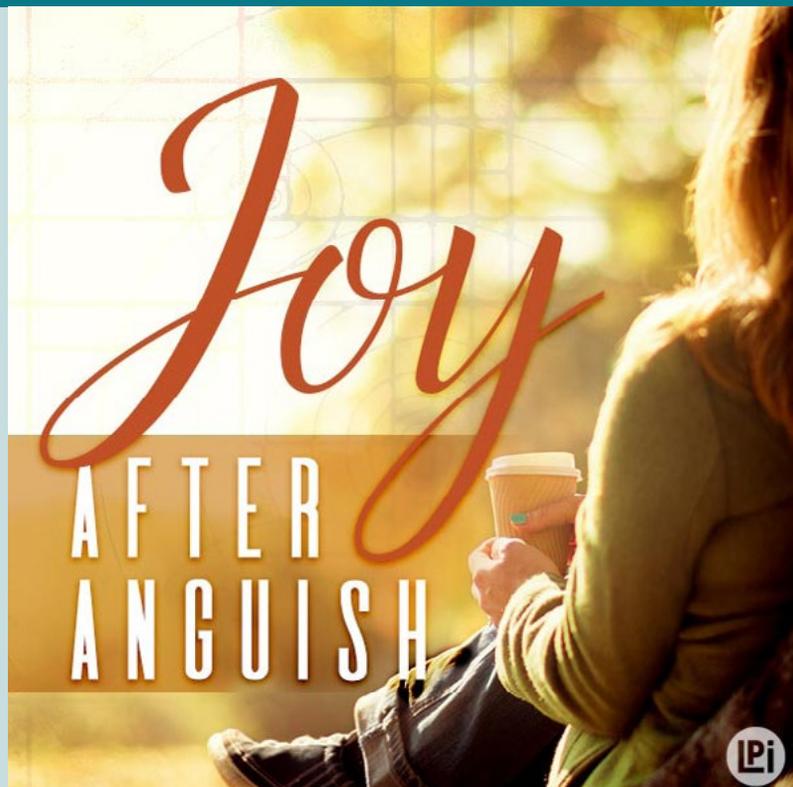
New Grace From God

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa, BSC

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32



When I was a senior in high school, my family took an international vacation, but I slept through my 3 a.m. alarm on the day of departure. When I finally awoke, there was a frenzied panic as I tried to troubleshoot as many possible options to get me to the airport two hours away to meet my family on time for the flight. Hope was slim, but it was there after a few hours of looking through phone books (remember those?) to find an available shuttle ride. But even as I stepped onto the shuttle, I wasn't sure that this plan was going to work out. My panic increased because now I was at the mercy of time. There was nothing else that I could do but to see how things would play out.

We've all had moments like this in our lives, moments when our throat sinks into our belly, and paralyzing apprehension takes over. It happens to us when we realize that we didn't show up for that scheduled appointment, when we forgot to pick up our son from school, when we left that report at home, or when we lock our keys in the car. It's a realization that we lost something of significance, and there's going to be a consequence following. We go into a panic mode of sorts, often acting uncharacteristically or erratically, like we're kinda going crazy!

Maybe this feeling is what the shepherd, woman, and Prodigal Son felt. What they had lost was of utmost value to them, and there was a heightened awareness of the aftermath if their lost item was not found. A desperate search ensues.

I remember sitting in that shuttle utterly disappointed that I didn't wake up in time and ashamed that I had put myself through those panicked few hours. I was terrified of missing my flight and afraid of my family's reaction were I to miss our vacation abroad. The interior dialogue was deafening during that two-hour ride to the airport. Things didn't get any better when I arrived. Everything heightened as I had to check my luggage and go through security. "What if something else goes wrong?"

In our Gospel text, the word rejoice (and its derivative, joy) appears five times. But note where in the context of the stories it appears ... after a period of turmoil. In other words, joy always follows the anguish. I like what Jean Vanier had to say about this: "Tensions or difficulty can signal the approach of a new grace of God." This new grace can come to us in many and varied ways, but so often, our hearts are not ready to receive that new grace, and the opportunity slips by unnoticed.

I did get to the airport just in the nick of time, and my family was waiting for me at the gate. I was still a little anxious as I waited with them to board the plane. It was only when I took my seat and my father, seated next to me, said, "I'm glad you're here" that a sudden flood of relief and joy came into my heart.

PRAYER

Lord,
I feel as though I am losing my grip and can barely hang on a moment longer.
In desperation, I reach my hand to you, God.
Grab me! Pull me out of this mess! Hear my earnest prayer!
I give my life to you today, every bit of it.
I'm yours. Help me. Be my God.
No longer will I build my life on shifting sand.
You are my rock, and with your help, I will establish my life on your firm foundation.
Deliver me from this pit, and I will praise you.
I will tell of your great wonders.
I will make known your wonderful ways, steadfast love, and unending power.
Thank you!
I know you hear me and that you save the humble and contrite of heart.
Forgive me for my decisions, actions, and attitudes that got me to this place.
I receive your forgiveness and power to change.
And as I am forgiven, I forgive each person that has contributed to my temporary defeat, for my victory is at hand.
You are here.
Amen.

— *A Prayer of Desperation*

Today, this very familiar Gospel passage speaks to me of joy, and it poses a few very simple questions: "Do I really encounter it?" "What am I willing to endure in order to experience it more deeply?" And "How do I foster joy in others?"

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