

My St Patrick Parish (5 of 8)

Forming part of the Kingdom of God – Christ builds a Joyful Kingdom
from Fr. Mark J. Niehaus, ISP

Homily for February 12, 2017—St Patrick Parish. Whitewater, WI

1st Sirach: set your heart on God, follow his commands and he will keep his eyes on you
2nd 1 Cor: speak of God's hidden wisdom; Eye has not seen, ear heard what God has prepared
Gspl Matt: Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it;
teach the law to become great in the Kingdom of Heaven
if you sin in your heart—lust, anger, etc—you will go to the anti-Kingdom
(Gehenna) where you will burn.

*Do you know the land imbued with joy
because the sun never sets there:
where in possession of the eternal goods
all hearts abide in tranquility;
where heart and will are continually refreshed
in the overflowing richness of God's gifts;
where love's magic wand
swiftly transforms all gloom into joy?*

J. Kantenich February 2, 1943

During these past weeks we have been looking at the Kingdom of Heaven. We are now quite familiar with the fact that our present St Patrick Church building began to be built 60 years ago. This place, this lot on the corner of Main and Elizabeth Streets, is our access point into the Kingdom Jesus in announcing throughout these past weeks in Matthew's Gospel.

Our common theme is to see that this church was not only given to us, to be received passively. No, we have entrusted ourselves into the Blessed Mother's care to have her teach us how to build this place of grace along with her. Our Gospel today marks some key points in this process.

The virtues we have been building with so far—love, purity and freedom—are most importantly noted in our interior attitude towards the things we are dealing with. Our goal is not simply to avoid meaningless exterior expressions but to build on true conviction. For Jesus it is not enough to avoid killing our neighbor and avoid adultery but that we be so in tune with him that we take seriously and ask for forgiveness when we merely get angry or have lustful thoughts. The interior relationship to God is key. Everything I do should be built on an exceptional desire to love... not just a superficial show.

Today's virtue—joy—seems quite different than what Christ talks about in the Gospel. The Lord is pointing out all the things we must avoid to gain the Kingdom of God and yet there are nuggets of truth that can be the source of enormous joy. With a joyful heart we do not simply live to avoid sin but give ourselves completely to God and he transforms that inner life at the same time.

Joy we know is a gift of the Holy Spirit. As is with so many other things we create the atmosphere in which it happens. We will look at three areas where we can work to allow joy to reign here at St Patricks. They are **gratitude**, **expectation** and **savoring**.

To understand this process we will use the image of a bag of candy. When someone gives us a bag of chocolates we begin by being grateful for such a gift, anticipating what they will taste like and enjoying each chocolate candy even after they are long gone. These three things lay the basis for joy to happen in our Kingdom of God here in our church.



First of all we are thankful for a gift of chocolate. **Gratitude** helps us to see real concrete things given to us that can bring us joy. How many things do we receive during each day that we can give thanks for. At a recent couples' group that I accompany they had the month resolution to invite each family member to give thanks for something that they had noticed during the day. The young children's prayers were instructive for their parents. They thanked for regular things like pillows, forks and kitchen tables... all things that most of us don't contemplate during the run-and-gun of daily life.

To be grateful for things each day gives us an attentiveness to God care each day. We may fret about the future of our family, home and community and yet to see how God, our friends, family and neighbors truly take care of little things builds up hope in us. This power of observation is fundamental for us to be joyful. Jesus truly does walk with us and despite what could happen he is right there with us today.

Next just as we anticipate what the chocolate might taste like, our **expectations** are very important for us to live joyfully. If I only expect things to be small, not be noteworthy, swift and painless, then our experience of joy will be small. The longer we try to accomplish something, work for something, try to pull something off, the greater our joy when it does happen. The more we truly strive to make this place, our St Patrick parish, into an access point into God's Kingdom the greater our joy will be when we make real, serious strides in that direction. All have a place in our church, moreover we want everyone else here. Do we try to bring as many here with us?

Finally, we need to learn the art of **savoring** all that we receive. Everything that we are given can be savored, like eating that chocolate candy piece slowly. The more attention we pay to enjoying the joys we receive, the deeper they wink into our memory and hearts. The deeper they go, the more they become part of who we are and cannot be separated from us. With these experiences in us we can be filled with joy despite living through difficult, even terrible, situations. When this profound experience is of God himself, the joy can be endless.

Would it not make our parish a profoundly deep access point to the Kingdom of God if we received Christ each week with gratitude, full of expectation and deeply savoring that encounter?

Each Sunday we can **give thanks** – *eukharistia* – that we hear his Word and receive his Body and Blood, so much greater than any chocolate.

Each Sunday could come at the end of a week where we longed to see Christ, with the **expectation** of what we bring to him from our week.

Each Sunday is one more chance **to savor** the richness of our relationship to Jesus.

If this is the case each Sunday would be an enormous chance to receive the joy God the Spirit has ready to send our way.

Practicing the virtue of joy we thank God once again for our home, our place of grace, St Patrick's church by praying:

This extraordinary place is known to me!
It is our parish radiantly lit
by Christ in the Eucharist,
where our Blessed Mother reigns
in the midst of her favorite children,
where Mary loyally rewards each act of our love
with tremendous fruitfulness and the gift of her virtues:
**Love, Purity, Freedom, Joy, Truth,
Sacrifice and Victorious Confidence.**
This is my home... our home,
the Father's Kingdom come;
my St Patrick parish!

MJN. January 13, 2017. Whitewater, WI
Based on J. Kentenich's *Home Song*
February 2, 1943. Dachau, Germany