

Joy in the Easter Seasons of my Life

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

John 15:11

In her novel, *Dinner at Homesick Restaurant*, Anne Tyler tells a story about an unhappy woman named Pearl Tull. Now blind and near the end of her life, she asks her son, Ezra, to read aloud the entries from her childhood diaries. He assumed she simply enjoyed reminiscing about her past. But one day...

He riffled through the pages, glimpsing buttonhole stitch and watermelon social and set of fine furs for \$22.50. "Early this morning," he read to his mother, "I went out behind the house to weed. Was kneeling in the dirt by the stable with my pinafore a mess and the perspiration rolling down my back, wiped my face on my sleeve, reached for the trowel, and all at once thought, Why I believe that at just this moment I am absolutely happy."

His mother stopped rocking and grew very still.

"The Bedloe girl's piano scales were floating out her window," he read, "and a bottle fly was buzzing in the grass, and I saw that I was kneeling on such a beautiful green little planet. I don't care what else might come about, I have had this moment. It belongs to me."

That was the end of the entry. He fell silent.

"Thank you, Ezra," his mother said. "There's no need to read any more."

As a spiritual director, I have the privilege of hearing about ecstatic times in people's lives—moments of falling in love, of finding one's true vocation in life, of extraordinary prayer experiences, of tremendous successes, and of feeling loved and accepted. But staying with these people as the months and years go on, I also hear about darker times. In those times, people sometimes mistakenly perceive their entire lives as dark and unhappy. When I remind them of joyful moments they've shared with me, they often dismiss them as delusional and unreal.

Saint Ignatius Loyola advised that when in consolation, I should prepare for desolation. He was not being morbid here and was not advising that I spoil a joyful moment by reminding myself that there are more troubles to come. Instead, he said this because he knew from experience that doubt and cynicism might set in all too soon. How, then, do I use this joy to prepare for desolation? The most important way is to be as faithful to prayer during the joyful times of my life as I am when I am in trouble. This may be difficult to do; I tend to turn to God more often during times of distress than during happy times. But to prepare for desolation, I should take my joy to prayer. I should praise God for it and ask God to show me ways that I might use this joy to bring about true growth and lasting peace in my life.

Excerpted from

God, I have Issues

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