

PRAISE TO JOY



JOY AS A HUMAN VALUE

The definition of joy could be: feeling of pleasure usually produced by success and manifested by a state of mind marked by satisfaction and a propensity to laugh or smile. It can also refer to the person who causes this feeling and transmits it to others, creating happiness and gladness around her. Seen like that, joy is a HUMAN VALUE. It is synonym of happiness and produces pleasure, hope and respect. LOVE is the greatest, deepest and most common source of joy because it is made of relationships and tends to be shared, expressed and lived with others. Joy is contagious. Let's do things with joy because the weight is less when there is joy.

As a value, joy springs from our inner being and is expressed through the peace that we generate. We need to cultivate and nurture the value of joy; it is a matter of decision. The one who does not love is unable to laugh. That is why the selfish persons suffer and they rarely express joy. If we wish to respect others, we have to include joy in our day-to-day life.

HYMN TO JOY

Listen to the [Hymn to joy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fFZaWMHaqw) in YouTube, using the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fFZaWMHaqw>

It is based on the last movement of the Ninth Symphony of Ludiwg van Beethoven; in 1970 Waldo de los Ríos, arranged and directed the Hymn to Joy for the Miguel Ríos.

AFJM IS JOY

The members of the AFJM receive the gift of joy from the Gospel because only the Word can give liberating and renovating strength. We are disciples who learn to pray and celebrate together. When I say "pray", I don't only refer to special moments of prayer but also to a prayer in and for daily life; the difference can be perceived in simple things like the rhythm of prayer, the timetable, the moments of prayer in common. This means that as far as possible, each group needs to search the timing that is convenient for them to be able to pray together. It is a prayer that is incarnated in reality, in our daily life, where we recognize the presence of God and his will in each specific moment or situation.

The members of the AFJM know how to celebrate together the achievement of each little objective, of each new step of evangelization. Pope Francis says that evangelization has to be joyful and beautiful.

The members of the AFJM are able to keep hoping in the difficult moments of their life because they have learnt about it in their personal encounter with Jesus and they wholeheartedly desire to announce it to others, overcoming the hardships of the journey.

THE GOSPEL IS JOY

“Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians, 4). The Church in the American continent has chosen joy as the leading thread for the American Missionary Congress which will take place in Bolivia in July 2018. The Church in America is a missionary Church and it has hoisted the Gospel as the banner of its mission following the pathways of joy indicated by the Vatican II Council and by Pope Francis in *Evangelio Gaudium* (2013) and in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016).

The Christian disciples and missionaries find their deepest motivation in their personal encounter with the Risen Lord. Facilitating this encounter between the Risen Lord and each human being has to be the objective of all evangelization and mission in the Church. And then, joy becomes a lasting happiness because of the presence of the Kingdom of God and of his love even in the human circumstances of misfortune described in the first part of the Beatitudes of Matthew (Mt. 5, 3-6). The joy of the Beatitudes is the joy of the Passion of Christ (Jn. 15, 11). Our Lady is the protagonist of that joy given by God, right from the greeting of the Angel (Lk 1, 28: “Rejoice, full of grace”) to the visit to Elizabeth and the song of the Magnificat which expresses the joy and happiness of faith (Lk 1, 39-45).

The messianic gladness of Advent is also geared towards this type of joy since the Church anticipates then the celebration of the Christmas joy: the One who comes is Jesus-Christ, God in person sent to redeem and save us (Is. 35,4). The Scripture texts of the Christmas Season (Is. 35, 1-6.10; James 5, 7-10; Mt. 11, 2-11) speak of the joy of a new period in the history of humanity, the time of the Messiah.

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.” (Is. 35, 1-6). It is how Isaiah begins his hymn of joy at the end of the exile in Babylon in the 6th century before Christ when the people begins to foresee its liberation and return to the Promised land as an intervention of God. Isaiah’s prophecy is full of joy and hope; it presents the imminent transformation of the social and political reality of the people of God using wonderful images of a renewed nature and a transfigured humanity to the point that the blind will see and the deaf will be able to hear, the lame will jump like a deer and the tongue of the dumb will sing.

Any human situation of oppression and marginalization, exploitation and exclusion in which the basic rights of the person are violated is similar to the situation of exile, rejection and extermination lived by the People of Israel. We have to enhance the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to express our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters who suffer today because of a heartless world where the human rights to life, freedom and dignity are disregarded.

Jesus, the Messiah makes himself known to John through his works which are the ones announced by Isaiah: “The blind can see, the lame can walk,... and the Good News is announced to the poor ” (Mt. 11, 5). The one who came and who is still coming every year at Christmas is the Messiah; his work and his Word transform the human being and the social conditions of humanity, proclaiming happiness and joy to the poorest of our world (Mt. 5, 3), not because of their present situation but because God stands on their side and will certainly change the course of history. To hope in Jesus, the Messiah and in his Word is an inexhaustible source of true joy.

(José Cervantes, Missionary Priest and Professor of Holy Scripture)

POPE FRANCIS AND JOY

Pope Francis' words inviting us to live joy: we recommend you to read the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" – we propose some extracts ...

N°1 EG...**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.** In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy...

N° 2 EG...**The great danger in today's world**, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. **God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt,** and the desire to do good fades.

N° 3 EG...No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since **"no one is excluded from the joy** brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus : "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you.

No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, **but is always capable of restoring our joy...**

N°4 EG...The books of the Old Testament predicted that the joy of salvation would abound in messianic times. The prophet Isaiah exultantly salutes the awaited Messiah: "You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy" (9:3). He exhorts those who dwell on Zion to go forth to meet him with song: "Shout aloud and sing for joy!" (12:6).

...Perhaps the most exciting invitation is that of the prophet Zephaniah, who presents God with his people in the midst of a celebration overflowing with the joy of salvation. I find it thrilling to reread this text: "The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives you the victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival" (3:17). **This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life,** as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: "My child, treat yourself well, according to your means... Do not deprive yourself of the day's enjoyment" (Sir 14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words!

N°5 EG... The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. "Rejoice!" is the angel's greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary's visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother's womb (cf. Lk 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:47). When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: "For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled" (Jn 3:29). Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Lk 10:21). His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (Jn 16:20). He then goes on to say: "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22). The disciples "rejoiced" (Jn 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that **the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts"** (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was **great joy**" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52).

N°6 EG ... I realize of course **that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life**, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress: "My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness...

N° 7 EG... 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". I can say that **the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to.** I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".

N° 8 EG...Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms **into an enriching friendship**, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization.

N°9 EG... Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

N°10 EG... The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and **become excited by the mission of communicating life to others**". that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means". Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that "**delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing**, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received **the joy of Christ**".

N°12 EG... The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that "he has loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us **to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task** so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.

N°13 EG... **The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance**: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon" (Jn 1:39). Together with Jesus, this remembrance makes present to us "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God" (Heb 13:7). Some of them were ordinary people who were close to us and introduced us to the life of faith. The believer is essentially "one who remembers".

N° 15 EG... **The Latin American bishops stated that we "cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings"**; we need to move "from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry". This task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:7).

N°21 EG... The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a **missionary joy**. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marvelled to hear the apostles preaching "in the native language of each" (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present.

N° 23 EG... In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. **The joy of the Gospel is for all people**: no one can be excluded. That is what the angel proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people (Lk 2:10).

N° 24 EG... The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. ...Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: "You will be blessed if you do this" (Jn 13:17). An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time... Finally an **evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always**. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT JOY

- .- We live in a world marked by difficulties, wars, sadness, divisions... How can this be compatible with the joy of the Gospel?
- .- Search for moments of joy in the Gospel and comment them.
- .- Read all the Gospel passages mentioned in the text and comment them.
- .- During our meetings, share with the other members, joyful facts or events that we have lived.
- .- Pray to discover the value of joy. Each group can compose a prayer and send it to all the members so that all can use it to pray.
- .- Bring joy to our meeting places and to our homes
- .- Study Pope Francis' words and let them enlighten the present reality of our life and of our group.
- .- Spread joy everywhere we are. How?

PRAYER

Poem by St. Teresa of Jesus

Happy heart

*Happy the one whose heart is in love
Who has put his thoughts in God alone;
For Him, he renounces to the creatures,
And in Him, he finds his glory and his satisfaction;
Even if he denies himself
Because all his desires are in God,
He can overcome with joy and happiness
The waves of this stormy sea.*

