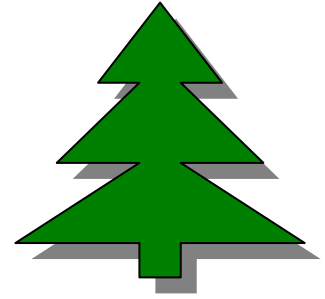


My Christmas Column for 2015 by Father John Catoir



How to Have a Merry Christmas

Some people are sad at Christmas, either because they miss times past when everyone was together (those days are gone forever); or they slip into self-pity because their expectations are too high. I've had my share of the doldrums in this connection, and I can assure you that there is a way to ease the pain and increase the joy. Maybe my story can be of help.

It was 1954 and I was on guard duty at midnight on Christmas Eve. There I was, a lonely private in the Army, walking my beat at Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio, Texas. I had been drafted right out of college. My civilian life seemed a million miles away, as I heard the sweet sound of the choir singing 'Adeste Fidelis' at the post chapel where midnight Mass was being held. The night was cold. I felt terribly sad being all alone with my M1 rifle...

It never dawned on me that I was giving in to self-pity, and was missing a wonderful opportunity to be happy with God. It would have been so much better had I united spiritually with the choir, and thought of God as a friend who was closer to me than my own heartbeat.

If I had said, "Thank you Lord for being here with me." I might have felt his presence, and been able to offer him my love in return. I wasn't at that stage of spirituality yet. I didn't realize that joy never comes to those who are caught up in their own brooding.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, a nineteenth century mystic, wrote, "*The secret of happiness, and the secret of all the saints is that they learned to love God as a friend.*" To love God as a friend is such a simple a thing to say, but it's not so easy to do. The Saints, however, seem to do it with ease.

The saints relate to God in a calm and intimate way. They stay focused on God's love, knowing that He loves saints and sinners alike. You don't have to be extra special to be God's friend. "Ask and it shall be done unto you." Jesus is a friend to all those who call upon him.

Never let your confidence in God's love be undermined by self-pity. Make a simple act of faith. Call on the Lord, and accept His love. When you focus too much on your woes and worries, instead of on God's wonderful love, your misery will be major and your happiness will be minor.

Learn to live joyfully because of the knowledge of God's love. It may take a little effort in the beginning, but in time it becomes easier.

Rising to a level of joy that this world cannot give is simply a matter of changing the way you think. The thoughts you think soon become the emotions you feel. If you think you're all alone in the world, your feelings of loneliness will intensify. But feelings are not facts, you are never alone. Jesus, your best friend, is always with you.

Dear Lord, you are my friend- I trust you with my life...

*Happiness is a butterfly
Which when pursued is just out of grasp...
But if you will sit down quietly,
It may alight upon you.*

-- Nathaniel Hawthorne