

The Joyful Parish

By Father John Catoir JCD, 2016

When was the last time you enjoyed a good family party? Parties are fun. They create a spirit of joy and family solidarity.

Do you ever think of your parish as gathering place for joyful celebrations? Try to remember the joy surrounding the birth of a child. The whole family comes together for the Baptismal party. Everyone is happy sharing in the miracle of life.

Or think of a Catholic School graduation party, which celebrates the first significant accomplishment of a son or daughter. Parents believe in providing a spiritual foundation for their children, and they are rewarded with the joy of giving them a better chance for success in a dangerous world. The graduates believe that they are 'free at last', and they are rewarded with gifts and hugs all around. Joy abounds.

Granted, not all pastors are bundles of joy, but try to abstract from the personality of the pastor. Think about the ideal behind parish life. For instance, when a new parish is established, there is a Mass to celebrate the beginning of a distinct support community. Parishes are meant to help families gain a wider sense of belonging. You can travel far and wide, and still feel at home in a Catholic Church half way around the world.

"Let all who put their trust in you, rejoice. Let them shout for joy because you are always there to defend them." Psalm 5:11.

Parish life provides a community in which each family can enjoy a sense of security. The Parish functions as a barrier against loneliness and isolation. "Heaviness of heart makes a person stoop, but a good 'party' (my translation) makes the heart glad." Proverbs 12:25.

We bring so much misery upon ourselves by the way we allow our minds to absorb all the gloom and doom around us. If you do not cultivate a joyful, optimistic state of mind, you will probably live a life of needless sadness. The local parish is there to offer you the opportunity to make your life a little more joyful.

Take weddings for example, they are certainly happy occasions. Are they sometimes too happy? Maybe, but always remember that Jesus turned the water into wine in order to keep the party going.

Permit me to tell you a little story. When I was president of the Catholic Press Association, from 1988 to 1990, I had to write a monthly article for the association's

newspaper, The Journalist. I chose to focus on the theme: ‘Spiritual Journalism’ for the entire two years. I wanted to validate the fact that a Diocesan Newspaper is practicing journalism at its best because it is dedicated to showing forth the joyful People of God in their daily lives.

Pope John Paul II put it this way: “Christ came to bring joy: joy to children, joy to parents; joy to friends and families; indeed, joy to the whole world. Joy is the keynote message of Christianity and the recurring motif of the Gospel. Go therefore and become messengers of Joy.”

I wanted to tell everyone associated with the Catholic Press from the editors, to the sales department and ad designers, that each one of them is helping to spread the joy of Christ to their readers.

Catholic journalists report on the joy that a parish can bring to all of us, not only through the sacramental life of the Church, but through a host of other activities that are all part of parish life.