**Giving Retreats  
  
by Father John Catoir**  
  
Someone asked me recently if I was retired. I am not retired, but I am recycled. When you're recycled you have a little more flexibility to take the assignments you most enjoy.  
  
I like to give retreats. On a retreat, people take time away from the ordinary duties of life to tend to their soul. They reflect on the bigger questions. What am I doing with my life? What does God expect of me? How can I find spiritual joy?  
  
Last year, on May 28th, the fortieth anniversary of my ordination, I was in Belgium giving a retreat to members of the royal families of four European countries. They were all cousins, and it was a family reunion as well.  
  
My connection with them began years ago when I was traveling with the late Cardinal Suenens of Belgium. He introduced me to King Baudouin, whom I soon learned was the unofficial spiritual father of all the Catholic royal families of Europe. He married a Spanish princess, and made her Queen Fabiola. Together they ruled serenely giving a wonderful example of holiness to those near and far.  
  
As a result of this friendship I met many princes and princesses, archdukes, counts, countesses and the like, from all over Europe. They have invited me back again this spring to give another retreat, which will be held somewhere near Vienna.  
  
I find it most interesting that they are so unexpectedly down to earth, so human and gracious. I am as comfortable with them as I am with the homeless.  
  
The theme of all my retreats is joy. Without disregarding the cross as central to our faith, it is nevertheless true that joy is the infallible sign of the Holy Spirit. The gloom and doom spirituality of the past, seems to have overlooked the implications of the words of Jesus on this topic.  
  
When the Lord said, "Be not afraid"(Luke 14:2), a phrase mentioned 365 times in the Bible, He meant it. If your faith is vigorous and strong, you can overcome fear. Unless you obey the Lord in this, you will be joyless.  
  
When Jesus said, "Be of good cheer. In this world you will have problems, but I have overcome the world,"(John 16:33), He meant it. Unless you obey Him, and reject all forms of self-pity, your life will be a series of sad groans.  
  
"If you love me and obey me," says the Lord; "I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit." (John 14:15). Joy is the fruit of the Spirit, (Gal 5:22). Obey Him, if only to avoid this rebuke: "Oh you of little faith,"(Matt. 8:26).  
  
Becoming a more joyful person takes discipline and self-control.  
  
I am finishing a book of daily meditations entitled, "Living the Gospel Joyfully, Day by Day," to be released soon by the Catholic Book Publishers Co., the same people who put out the Missal and Lectionary used at every Sunday Mass.  
  
Here are a few Scripture quotes, which express the theme of joy:  
  
"For the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10). "Can any of you through worry add a single moment to your span of years?" (Luke 12:31).  
  
"Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete," (John 16:24).  
  
God created you for happiness. Believe it. "All the way to heaven is heaven," as St. Catherine of Sienna said, but you must claim it to make it so.