

The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 5, 2025

Chances are, some of the happiest people we know are volunteers we bump into either here in the parish, at our children's schools, or at hospitals. They are always so cheerful and greet everyone with a big smile and warm hug. No matter how we may be feeling, they never fail to cheer us up. Once they know our names they treat us like family and we even begin to look forward to seeing them because of their bubbly personalities.

What's the secret to their happiness? Most likely it is that they find joy in serving others. Being of help to someone and making another person's day a little brighter drives them. No matter what they are asked to do they embrace it with enthusiasm and good cheer. They are not looking for thanks or praise. In fact, they may get embarrassed when they are recognized for their work. They are simply happy to be of service. The joy they feel in helping others is enough thanks for them.

This is the kind of joy that Jesus is inviting us to seek in today's gospel. As Jesus describes it, a good servant knows that serving his master is what is expected of him. He doesn't need his master to tell him that he's doing a good job or to applaud him every time he serves him dinner or cleans his room. He is thankful to have a job and may have even grown fond of his master over the years. He takes pride in being a good servant and sleeps well at night because he knows in his heart that he is doing his duty.

Now, all of us naturally want recognition and praise, especially when we have worked hard. And we should always be quick to thank and recognize. That's the right thing to do. But if thanks and recognition become the primary reason for serving, then it is not going to end well for us. Inevitably someone will overlook us or take us for granted. It is bound to happen. If we are only in it for the praise, then our pride will be wounded and we'll stop helping out. That's because we were not really in it to help others but to help ourselves.

The other thing that is bound to happen is that we'll only volunteer for "high profile" jobs. We want to make sure that other people see us doing good, so we won't want to help out behind the scenes. Setting up before everyone arrives and cleaning up after everyone leaves will not be for us.

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If that's our attitude, we will never know the pure joy that comes from serving others. Because we're too focused on ourselves and getting our emotional needs met, we won't really be able to open our hearts to people. We'll be too busy asking ourselves "what's in it for me?"

Instead, real joy comes from forgetting ourselves in service to others. When we tend to another person's pain and sorrows, we forget our own, even if just for a time. It is the satisfaction that remains with us after we've helped others carry their cross and have empathized with their pain. It is a feeling of real connection with another human being that reminds us that we are not alone. That joy is the secret of the happiest people on earth.

And it was just this joy that Jesus had in His heart. There is no better example of someone who gave of Himself without counting the cost than Jesus Himself. Though He had perfect joy in Heaven as the Beloved Son of God, He was pleased to do His Father's will and come down to earth, being born a man like us. Most of His time on earth - 30 of the 33 years of His life - He spent in a small town working as a common laborer with only Mary and Joseph knowing His true identity. And when He did begin to preach the Good News, He faced criticism and persecution for it. Yet, despite all those difficulties, He never stopped doing His Father's will. If He had been doing it just for human praise, He never would have made it out of Nazareth. But because He was doing it to please His Heavenly Father, He endured opposition and persecution right up until His death on the cross.

That is what God is asking of us - to give simply for the pure joy of helping others and doing God's will.

This attitude is also connected to Jesus' first words in today's gospel - that men and women of faith can do great things. Faith is simple trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. It is the confidence that God will never abandon us. Those who live by faith are unstoppable. Nothing can keep them from pressing on and doing God's will. Criticism doesn't deter them. Problems and worries don't get in their way. They roll over it because they know God is with them and will see them through it. The assurance that they are doing what God wants is all the thanks they need. In this way, they are just like Jesus.

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There is another important truth that people of faith recognize. God does not owe us anything. There is nothing we can give God that He has not already given us. There's nothing we can do that God hasn't given us the power to do in the first place. Our very existence is a free gift of God's love. So it would be ridiculous for us to shake our fists at God and say, "Hey, I could use a little thanks for all the great stuff I'm doing!" The fact is - no matter how much we do - it is really the least we can do for all that God has already given us. We are the ones who need to be more grateful- not God. "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do."

At this Eucharist, we join our humble efforts to please God with Jesus' great sacrifice. We mingle our joys and tears with those of Jesus and offer them to the Father on this altar. The Eucharist literally means "thanksgiving". It reminds us that all we have comes from God, and teaches us to be grateful. It also feeds our spirit so that we can go out from this place to do God's will without counting the cost so that, one day, we can take our place at the heavenly banquet that Jesus is preparing for all those who have served Him and His people with joy.