

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C (2025)

The Declaration of Independence guarantees the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." However, what do the words "pursuit of happiness" mean to most people today?

Most of us think of "pursuit" (in that phrase) to mean "chasing happiness" — as "in "seeking" or "going after" something or someone.

Arthur Schlesinger wrote in an essay many years ago that at the time of the Declaration's composition, "the pursuit of happiness" did not mean 'chasing or seeking happiness'—it meant the practice of happiness, the experience of happiness, the enjoyment of happiness.

A group of 70 people was attending a seminar. Suddenly, the speaker stopped and started giving each person a balloon. He asked them to write his or her name on it. The balloons were collected and placed in another room. He then invited people next door and told them to find their balloon. As everyone frantically searched, utter chaos erupted.

At the end of 10 minutes, no one could find his or her own balloon. So, the leader invited them to randomly choose any balloon and give it to the person whose name was written on it. Within minutes, everyone had their own balloon.

The speaker said, "Everyone is frantically pursuing happiness, not knowing where to find it. Our happiness lies in the happiness of other people. Give them their happiness, and you will receive it back in return.

In our Gospel today, Martha's "happiness" has to do with "seeking it" or "going after it." While Mary's "happiness is actually practicing happiness, experiencing happiness."

Christians use a better word than "happiness". We use the word "joy." Jesus is giving us a proper understanding of what the "pursuit of joy" is all about. *Seeking* joy is one thing, but *obtaining* it and *experiencing* it is an entirely different matter. It is the difference between dreaming and reality.

Jesus knows what is in Martha's heart— she is worried and anxious. He doesn't want Martha to be so frazzled and stressed. He wants her to feel a sense of calm, refreshment, and joy.

Because Jesus knows the best way to pursue joy, the best way to experience happiness, the best way to rest in joy is by listening to him, before “doing” anything else.

Have you ever noticed that for most of us, it is so much easier to do the talking than to do the listening? Few have mastered the art of being a good listener— attentive, respectful, and patient with what others have to say.

Regardless of which category we fall into, one area in which many of us fail as ‘good listeners’ is in our spiritual lives. When it comes to God, are we really trying to hear what God has to say? Or are we the ones who say, “Listen, Lord! Your servant is speaking!”

Don't get me wrong— listening is an essential part of our prayer lives. Unfortunately, it is God whom we expect to do the listening. God is the one we want to be attentive to us. God is the one we want to hear *what we have to say*—and so, *we* “dominate” the conversation.

We give God a laundry list of our problems. We tell him everything and everyone we want “fixed”. We steer the “conversation” in the direction we desire, the things we want to discuss, and God cannot get a word in edgewise.

It takes a trusting faith to let God say whatever it is God wants to say. It takes a patient faith to let God speak first and last. It takes a humble faith to believe that what God has to say is infinitely more important than anything we might have to say.

Not that God doesn't care about our problems. He does. More than we can imagine. God always has our best interests at heart. God knows what we need to hear at any given moment. God knows how to guide us in the direction of true joy, regardless of the chaos that surrounds us.

Therefore, like Mary, we would be wise to rest at the feet of Jesus and let Him initiate the conversation—allow Him to speak the words we truly need to hear—having *a Mary heart in a Martha's world*.

