Joy: A Tool for Evangelization

Though there are far too many great things to discuss about dogs in one bulletin article column, if I had to pick one thing about dogs that I love the most, it is their joy. Emmett is often waiting by the door when I come home, he's always smiling, happy to be around his human friends, and to meet new ones. (In fact recently on a walk, as we stopped and walked through the school while the students were heading out for the day, he was greeted by 50 or so kids and the smile on on his face would make you think he'd been given the key to Von Hanson's meat shop and had the place to himself). He has this incredible calming effect on me, and you are just happier being around him.

This joy has also been something I've seen in so many ways here at our parish.

One my first day in July of 2015, I was greeted by the staff with doughnuts, and it felt so welcoming. That joy and positivity has been something I've seen day in and day out, from Josh, one of our maintenance staff who is always washing windows on Monday morning greeting people as they come in, to Susan, the newest member of our staff who is on the front line always greeting people with a smile. Then a walk over to the school and you'll see Kelly our principal greeting kids and parents, or stop into a classroom and see the teachers encouraging and teaching the students day in and day out. After Masses, you see this too in so many of our parishioners who liked to visit and talk, and over the years I've gotten to so many who are so kind and supportive, and who do so much for our parish from helping in faith formation, to counting money, to decorating or cleaning, and so many other activities, all done with joy.

Joy is a wonderful thing in our lives. Recently at the funeral of Barb Scholl, who was one of the most kind and joyful people I've ever met, I mentioned in my homily how with her I was reminded of the Disney film "Pollyanna" based on the book. If you remember that film, Pollyanna is the positive and upbeat girl who breathes life into her town, her home and her church as so many people are dour until she comes along. Joy is such an important part of our spirituality; one can know when to bow and genuflect and be an expert on the commandments or moral theology, but if they do not life it out and are joyless, evangelization can't happen, and theres an impediment to spiritual growth.

We hear from the prophet Isaiah: "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul." This week, we also light the rose colored candle, as we celebrate "Gaudete Sunday," which is taken from the opening antiphon of Mass, and it symbolizes how Christmas is nearing, so we should be joyful.

A question for us to think about this week is how do we radiate true joy in our lives? I think it comes down to being a person of action and a prophet.

With respect to action, by how we lead our lives in terms of our relationships with people, we can do so much to help them see God more clearly, and to be people of joy too. Its so many little things we do – bringing a spouse flowers on an ordinary day; helping a son or daughter with homework; or spending time together as a family, volunteering to help others, that in and of themselves might seem so insignificant, but over a lifetime, those little moments can do so much to foster faith. And so over these next couple of weeks as we are running around from malls to card stores to post offices,

my hope is we don't forget that while the gifts under the tree will be great, so much more so are all those intangible gifts that we give over the course of the year in the forms of kindness and love that will do so much to change hearts and win souls for Christ.

Finally, while those gifts of kindness and love need to apply to those we know in our families, they also need to apply to the people that sometimes can get forgotten. Prophets reminded the people of God's presence and love for them, and we must remember we share in that ministry through our baptism. It's so easy to take for granted what people do, and to see them just for their function first, rather than their humanity. And while we do not have to be everyone's best friend, I think more and more in a society that gets less personal, it's so easy to become blind that we are to see everyone as Christ sees them, and must treat one another with love. What that looks like in action is doing those little things. For instance we had the giving trees in our lobby, and many parishioners picked up gifts for people in need. On a daily basis, there's so much we can do, such as thanking someone for the job they are doing or taking a few moments to get to know someone at the office, rather than starting the conversation with "can you take care of this for me." It can mean calming down when service as slow at a restaurant rather than berating a waitress, taking into account that maybe they are short-staffed and she is going as fast as she can; or not taking out holiday shopping frustration on the clerk when a return policy isn't to our liking. By addressing someone by their name rather than "hey waitress" or with a kind word to a clerk, it might not seem like a moment of evangelization, but their day may just become a little better because we decided to live out our faith in that moment. The biggest need people have is to be loved. The Holy Father, John Paul II, called this the personalistic norm, which says "A person is an entity of a sort to which the only proper and adequate way to relate is love." When we do that, we can do so much in helping one another realize how much we are loved by God, and help to shed light on the darkness that can sometimes fill our lives, by saying with our actions you are more than a waiter, an administrative assistant, or a cashier: you are a human being who is unique and created in the image of God.

When I look at my life and the people who handed on the faith to me, I learned so much not just from seminary, but through the hard work my parents did at their jobs, but also at home in helping me with homework; in seeing them help my grandparents, and seeing them make sacrifices for their family – things they did out of love for others. I look back and see what they have done, and continue to do, and see a faith that is put into practice on a daily basis. That joy of my family and so many in my life continues to sustain me, and I'm reminded that I need to express that too through how I live my life every day if I want to be a true fisher of men.

Have a wonderful week ahead, and God's blessings to you and your loved ones.

Fr. Paul