

*But your sorrow shall be turned into joy*

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Last week, on *Good Shepherd Sunday*, we heard that Jesus is the *Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep*. He is the *Good shepherd* who has bought the pasture, who has fenced in the flock, who tends to the lambs. He went into the highways and byways seeking out His lost sheep. He sought out His disciples and followers who had hidden themselves in the days after His death, to welcome them into His Resurrection. And He continues to seek out His lost Sheep. Today, in these 40 days of Easter Tide, we hear in the Gospel, *a little while and ye shall not see me, and a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father*. To the modern hearer this just sounds like a riddle, yet the Church looks back and remembers that Jesus foretold of His death and Resurrection just as He foretold of His ascension and coming again. *The Good Shepherd* finds His lost sheep in Easter Tide and then prepares to ascend to His Father, to leave His flock, but He *will not leave them comfortless* or shepherd-less.

Jesus said to them that night of the Last Supper, *a little while and ye shall not see me, and a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father*. It's a strange saying, isn't it? But Jesus had also said other strange things, *no one takes my life from me, I lay it down freely, and destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days, and I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep*. These sayings had confused Jesus' disciples, but all these sayings had been fulfilled on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. He spends the forty days of Easter appearing to, speaking with, and spending time with His disciples, preparing them for what will soon unfold. So that after He ascends into heaven they will be able to look back and begin to make sense of it all. The Disciples have often been confused by Jesus and His teachings, and it only became more confusing during Holy Week and after Easter Sunday. The Forty Days of Easter are days of illumination and enlightenment for the Disciples. The meaning of Life and death have been forever changed and take on a new meaning. Jesus has transformed life, so that His followers can die to sin, come alive to righteousness and begin to follow Jesus Christ back to God the Father. Death is new. Life is new. Everything is made new by Jesus' Death and Resurrection. Even death is overshadowed by a life in Christ. But a life of sin, apart from Christ Jesus is Death. A living soul who dies to sin and comes alive to God through Jesus Christ begins to live a new and spiritual life of joy that will never end. St. Paul writes, *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory, for the sting of death is sin*.

And yet, life and death are not the only experiences of the Christian life which Jesus' Resurrection has transformed. For Jesus tells us Himself in today's Gospel that He has transformed joy and sorrow. Jesus tells His disciples that when He goes away the Disciples will be filled with sorrow, they will grieve, because Jesus will leave them in Person and in the Flesh. They will spend the rest of their lives remembering when the Word of Life had been made flesh in Jesus, when He dwelt with them, when they had walked and talked together. But Jesus tells them *ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. Their sorrow will be transformed into joy, joy that surpasses happiness, more than a "warm and fuzzy" feeling, joy that lasts, that is so profound that sorrow is forgotten. This is joy that makes the heart to rejoice, joy that cannot be taken away.

But let us be clear, God does not offer us happiness, nor is he concerned with our happiness. Remember, when our Lord was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, and Satan took Him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, promising Him happiness, promising Him praise and riches and wealth, and kingdoms unimaginable? God offers something far better. God offers joy. He offers a joy that cannot be taken away, that is rooted in heaven and not in earth. Joy that can carry one through the hardest of times and circumstances. This joy is made complete in eternity with Jesus in heaven. If all that God wanted for us was to be happy, then He would not have been concerned with our sin or with the Offering that His Son made for us in bringing this sin to death! Jesus did not die on the Tree of Calvary to make us happy. He died to make men good. And He knew that the only way to make men good was through nailing sin, through His hands and feet, to the Tree.

St. Thomas a 'Kempis reminds us, *It is not hard for a fervent lover of God to rejoice in tribulation [like the disciples of old] for all of his joy and glory is in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brief glory is what men can give, and commonly, some grief follows after. The joy and gladness of good men is in their own conscience. The joy of righteous men is in God and of God, and their gladness is in virtue and in a good life...He who seeks worldly joy, and does not in his heart fully despise it, shows himself openly to love but little the joy of heaven.* The disciples were not just good men, and neither should we seek to be just good. With the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them and their lives open to the working of the Holy Spirit, the disciples became righteous, and found what it means to have the true joy of heaven. Jesus

promises to us that same Holy Spirit, and that same joy, which filled His disciples on the day of Pentecost.

How do we get this joy of heaven? How do we possess the joy that Jesus promises His disciples? How can we find this joy that overcomes sorrow and that not man can take from us? We have receive the Holy Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation. We receive the Holy Spirit through receiving Christ's Body and Blood. Now all that remains is for us is to become confessing Christians. We must open our hearts to God who knows and searches out the hearts of all men. We must repent of our sins and strive to live better lives. We too must continually die to sin and be resurrected to newness of life. Only when we have done these things, when we have learned the habit of continually confessing our sins and striving to lead a life following after our Lord, will we learn the Joy of God. God is working to transform us into the very image and likeness of His Resurrected Son. And it is only through Him that we have any hope of finding His kingdom of Joy. As C. S. Lewis puts it so well: *There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.*