

Year of Faith:

Rediscovering the joy of believing and communicating the faith

Jude Muscat



The Joy of believing

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#163) instructs us that “Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Then we shall see God ‘face to face,’ ‘as he is.’ So faith is already the beginning of eternal life.” This beautiful definition of Faith already contains a degree of joy even as a statement, let alone when this kind of Faith becomes a way of life to the believer. Faith, therefore, is not a static piece of information that subsists in our mind, but rather a dynamic activity of the person who is joyfully journeying to the Father’s house. Faith is also a total surrender to God since in obedience we freely submit our whole selves to God “offering the full submission of intellect and will to God” (*Dei Verbum* 5).

These two aspects of Faith—the dynamic activity and total surrender—offer us a healthy paradox. The positive tension that exists between the two helps us to delve deeper into the object of our faith. This conjures up an analogy in my mind. Let us picture ourselves conquering the great turbulence of a dangerous rapid. Each rower in the boat must row for his life, and for the lives of the others, as if everything depended on his energy, strength and will to survive. At the same time,

each rower must submit all his energy, strength and will to the instructions of the team leader, who knows and has experienced the rapids several times, and is a master who knows well the strengths of his team members.

This is the ‘journey here below.’ This journey gives us a fore-

taste of heaven, the place where joy and peace ‘surpasses all our understanding’ (Phil 4:7).

The joy of believing has its source in the Triune God. This joy is eternal and most excellent in its character. Faith is, in modern parlance, the hyperlink that takes us directly to this source of joy, the attraction that gives power to our journeying feet



and compels us into action. Being with the master rower in the boat is in itself a source of joy. In his wisdom, God called us into his team, empowered us and built us up into a community of believers. Our Lord and Master does not simply sit by the river bank shouting instructions. He rows with us and we with him. He binds us all together in a union of joy.

The joy of belonging

Psalm 122 captures and preserves the ecstatic joy of the Old Testament pilgrims journeying to the House of the Lord. Without concerning ourselves with scholarly debates, we just accept the fact that at some point in time Jerusalem became the goal of pilgrimages for all of the twelve tribes of Israel (Ps 122:4). This foreshadows the journeying Christians towards the New Jerusalem. The psalm brings to us the initial joy, even prior to the journey itself: “I rejoiced when they said to me ...” (v. 1). We do not know anything about the journey itself, because in verse 2 the pilgrim’s feet are already at the gates! Psalm 42 gives us an indication of the multitude in procession “with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving” (v. 4). Saint Augustine captures the spirit of this Psalm when he describes this yearning for the House of the Lord as a flame that spreads among the believers and excites them to move together in joy. The joy expressed by the pilgrim in Psalm 122 lies in the object of his love: Jerusalem. Jerusalem is God’s resting place (Ps 132:14) and the place where the community assembles to praise Him (cf. 122:4).

Coming together as a praying community in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is and should always be an expression of joy. Our communities, prayer meetings, and conferences should

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never be routine events that fill our calendars with activity, but rather a spontaneous shout of joy accompanied by our songs of thanksgiving and praise. Our meetings should be rooted in the journey towards eternal life, which, as we have seen above, is a foretaste of the joy in heaven. On 26 May 2012, Pope Benedict XVI told members of the Renewal in the Spirit in Italy, “Do not succumb to the temptation of mediocrity and habit!” The Spirit of God that bears the fruit of joy in our hearts is eternally active in us and in the community of believers. Surrendering to him in joy gives life to the believing community. Mediocrity, in contrast, is a community killer and breeds apathy, indifference, laziness, grumbling and lack of initiative, transforming us into an unproductive, dull and uncreative group of people.

Joy: a fruit of the Spirit

Rediscovering this inner joy means that we need to rediscover the fruit of the unique experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. With a certain dose of nostalgia and a deep desire to relive this powerful experience, I recall and passionately sing: “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, down in my heart, down in my heart ...”

Catechesis and study are essential elements of our Christian life. These are indeed important for our ecclesial maturity and growth. There must always be a perfect balance between the charismatic and the institutional dimension in our lives and in the life of the Church. We must all keep in mind that the uniqueness of this joy will not spring out of books, but rather from the dynamic and explosive experience of freely surrendering to the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Joy as a fruit of the Spirit is contagious because it does not spring from worldly events but from the bosom of the Triune God. Therefore, it is a universal kind of joy that is common to all. This joy does not emanate from one’s culture, but rather it affects and transforms one’s culture into a joy that surpasses cultural boundaries. Throwing the ecstatic expressions of joy into the bin of culture is a reductionist narrative of the transforming power of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Joy as a fruit of the Spirit invariably leads us to *Galatians 5*. Paul uses the phrase “works of the flesh” to speak about vices, while he introduces the virtues with “fruit of the Spirit.” Paul emphasises important differences between the two. On the one hand, he stresses the peaceful and spontaneous activity of a life led by the Holy Spirit, and on the other, he says that human efforts can only lead to corruption. The joy that the world cannot take from us (cf. Jn 16:22) belongs only to God, mediated to us by

Christ and fulfilled in us by the Holy Spirit.

A different kind of Joy

We have seen that the Joy of the Spirit flows out of the Triune God and is not a product of human efforts. It is pure joy that surpasses understanding and sometimes its logic is somehow confusing. The two parables in *Luke 15:1–10* have always intrigued me. To think that a shepherd would leave the 99 to seek out one sheep does not belong to human logic, unless of course the sheep produces golden fleece. The story of the woman who lost one silver coin out of ten is quite understandable. Then we are surprised to learn that she calls her neighbours to rejoice with her when she finds the coin. The text does not define the celebration, but what sense does it make to waste time energetically seeking the lost coin and then spend it on neighbours?

On deeper reflection, one rejoices in the fact that God does not have human logic—I would still be a lost sheep if God had my logic! Secondly, Jesus in Luke’s gospel is mostly concerned with the joy over a repentant sinner. God is totally other, holy, faithful and merciful, and deals with us as a most loving father. The love for the lost is transformed into action, action is transformed into life for those who accept God’s loving outreach—and then the celebration begins in heaven. Oh, if I could witness the angels and the saints rejoicing over one repentant sinner!

Joy brings people to God

Joy, as we discussed earlier, is a community builder and so according to the previous paragraph’s logic, it goes round a full circle: from joy to love, then to action, then to life, and again to joy in heaven and on earth. Joy itself becomes a powerful means of sharing the good news. The loving community (cf. Jn 13:35) that reaches out to the lost is a living expression of joy, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Joy touches and heals the human heart that is immersed in the culture of death and darkness. Joy calls out into the depths of the oppressed, the marginalised and those whose will to live is lost or impaired, due to poverty of every kind.

Rediscovering this joy is a pillar in the structure of new evangelisation. It is like the tidings of great joy that shone in the darkness around the shepherds on Christmas day. As the angels announced the good news, the glory of God shone and darkness became light, mediocrity became joy, the spiritually dead lived again, and we all walk together with shouts of joy on the journey to eternal life. 🙌

Bold and Faithful Leaders

■ Marcos Volcan



There are many factors involved in the management of people and business administration. The quantity of books and courses we now have that deal with this subject, not only in the business world but in religious settings as well, testifies to that.

In this treatment, we will seek in the Scriptures some principles that guided the community of apostles in the early Church regarding the formation of faithful, bold leaders.

In the *Book of Acts*, we are presented to a community seriously involved in carrying out the challenging mission that had been assigned to them—that of proclaiming the Gospel. From the account of the dramatic events throughout the *Book of Acts*, we can see that the work of the early Church required from its members, and especially from its leaders, a great deal of commitment, time and energy, as well as a tremendous ability to solve problems. Chapters 3 and 4, for example, describe the ministry of Peter and John, who, after healing a lame man, teach the people in the Temple. Because of that, the authorities arrested, questioned and threatened them.

We can see how the community of the apostles dealt with the challenges and persecution they were experiencing. In *Acts* 4:29-31, the prayer of the Apostles can help us understand the nature of the service their community wanted to offer to the Lord:

“Now, Lord, consider their threats...”

The members of the community were facing the serious problem of threats to their own physical integrity. After all, it was the religious authorities of the time who had sentenced Jesus to death. The disciples knew that they would suffer persecutions because Jesus himself had warned them (cf. Lk 21:12). What did they do then? They surrendered the threats to the Lord because they understood it was not in their ability to solve that problem. This did not mean that they were irresponsible, but it showed that they understood only the Lord could take care of that. With this attitude, one of complete trust in God, they were able to deal with worries and fear. Such feelings usually deprive people from their best energies and can even paralyse people. Instead, they went on to ask God for boldness.

“... and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”

I once heard someone say that the more you pray, the more evil attacks you will suffer. Many people believe this. The apostles prevented themselves from being bound by this belief when they asked for boldness. As we can see, they did not focus on the problem but on the mission instead. They had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve and, because of that, they prayed to God to enable them to proclaim the Word.

The Lord himself had entrusted them this mission. In their ears, the strong voice that said, “Go throughout the world” (Mk 16:15); and “teach all nations” (Mt 28:19) was still resounding. They probably thought of those words as they woke up in the morning and went to sleep at night. It was a burning desire that they were willing to foster and nurture in the life of the community: “no evil allowed.” As we can see in the verses that follow, they needed

courage to do that. They wanted to move ahead using the same means used by Peter and John in their teaching at the temple and which had caused the authorities to arrest them.

“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

The community prayed to God to give to them, in the name of Jesus, the grace of signs and wonders to attest to the proclamation of the Gospel. They did not ask for protection or wealth. They asked for empowerment to accomplish their mission in the way predicted by Jesus in *Mark* 16:15: “these signs will follow those who believe.” In *John* 14:12, Jesus said they would work wonders greater than His. Theirs was a bold request and, more importantly, was totally centred on Jesus. Peter in the temple did the same when he said that the lame man had been healed by Jesus and not by him or by John (cf. *Acts* 3:16).

We can clearly see that this community was being led towards the fulfilment of their mission by seeking the will of God. The discernment they used to interpret God’s will was to keep alive in their memories what Jesus had told them. That is, they kept his words. This helped the community to deal with a serious problem that is inherent to the human condition and that, for several times, was the big issue that the prophets in the Old Testament had to address. The people of God had a short memory and easily forgot the signs of his presence among them.

However, keeping alive the memory of the Lord is the kind of discipline that creates committed service and thankful hearts. In other words, it engages people in service and makes them want to give out their lives in return. The community of the apostles promoted this type of virtuous circle (cf. *Acts* 4:32-35). It was a community that claimed its mission based on Jesus’ words. It seems that this authority was exactly what the Lord had wanted to give them. In verse 31, the community experienced a new Pentecost:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

The Spirit renewed the life of the early Church by repeating the experience of Pentecost. The community of the apostles teaches us that when we face problems and difficulties, we cannot count on our own strengths. We have to count on the assistance and the power of the Spirit. Paul, the apostle will later warn the Galatians to be careful not to finish by means of the flesh what they began by means of the Spirit (cf. *Gal* 3:3).

The community believed they could not dispense with new outpourings of the Spirit. With this outpouring of the Spirit, the disciples receive courage and boldness, until then unknown to them, to deal with persecution. They develop new missionary activities, with a broader view. They overcome obstacles that, before, seemed to be too big for them to overcome. With this new perspective, challenges become opportunities. Temporary difficulties are seen as glory and considered as a training ground for disciples. They, in turn, should be attentive to the callings of the Lord and the new missions that unfold. 🏠



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

What if a leader's life is not in order?

Whoever becomes a disciple of Christ, Paul teaches, must “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22–24).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a great grace, an empowerment for continuing conversion and holiness. All Christians, but especially leaders, must be people of holiness, integrity and good character. They must be reasonable, thoughtful, and selfless, and must avoid all impurity, idolatry, hatred, jealousy, anger, rivalry, and pride.

St. Paul teaches that a leader, “as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Tit 1:7–9). Paul strongly condemns a disordered life as slavery to the selfish tendencies of the flesh (Gal 5:19–21; Eph 4:17–19), which are contrary to the good fruit produced by the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23).

If a leader of a prayer group or community lives in moral disorder, this grieves the Holy Spirit, blocks the spiritual growth of members, and creates disunity.

Sins to which leaders can be tempted include pride; hypocrisy; boasting; lust in all its forms; the love of money, material possessions, and honours; and the refusal to submit to legitimate Church authority.

Leaders must guard especially against pride, which can result from entrusting excessive responsibility to the newly-converted, or from the exercise of charisms that are considered prestigious such as prophecy, words of knowledge, and healing. Remember that the exercise of charisms does not prove one’s holiness or maturity.

Pride can lead one to criticise others, challenge authority, and reject reprimands. Criticism and judgement can in turn destroy harmony in a group.

Similarly, an attachment to material possessions, envy, or the desire to get rich quickly are traps that subject a person to the grip of the idol “mammon.”

When a brother in leadership compromises sexual purity (through adultery, cohabitation, or pornography), it causes grave scandal and can lead to even more serious sins such as corrupting the young under the guise of spiritual accompaniment.

Sometimes a prayer group leader lacks discernment and exposes the community to spiritual influences contrary to the teaching

of the Catholic Church. For example, if he attends non-Catholic churches, he may be exposed to groups infected with spiritualism that experience false prophecies, false visions, counterfeit gifts of healing and deliverance, and false tongues.

Satan also tempts leaders through sins of omission: lack of repentance, neglect of reading the word of God, laxity in prayer, inadequate practice of the sacraments, resistance to the Holy Spirit, the propensity to be guided by mystical messages and visions instead of walking by faith, and spiritual complacency.

The Response to Disordered Behaviour

Jesus prescribes how to practice fraternal correction (Mt 18:15–18), which may require disciplinary measures to protect the community. Fraternal correction must begin with prayer, interceding for the individual and asking God for wisdom in approaching the topic. To be effective, fraternal correction must be done with humility (see Mt 7:3–5), and we must forgive in advance the fault we address; otherwise the process will degenerate into a fruitless accusation. Here are some concrete examples:

- A brother who had practiced idolatry and the occult converted and committed himself zealously to serve the Lord. Shortly afterwards, he was appointed shepherd of the prayer group, where he made sure that newcomers received spiritual training. However, he had not given up all his spiritualist practices. He used them during prayers of deliverance. This syncretism was disastrous. After discernment by the diocesan core group, this brother was called to order by the chaplain and directed to stop his dark practices. They prayed with him before Jesus in the Eucharist. He promised to obey, but he did not because he thought they were jealous of his gifts. He was denounced and suspended from his duties as shepherd. The decision was communicated to the parish congregation.
- Another brother in charge of training in a prayer group had inappropriate relationships with women. Despite the obvious charisms that contributed to his standing, the leadership removed him from office and replaced him.
- Other leaders were dismissed for embezzling money from the group or for fraudulent practices.

Conclusion

Fraternal correction does not always give the desired results, even when done in a context of love and brotherhood. When leaders, blinded by pride, are no longer concerned about causing confusion or scandal, it takes a sincere conversion, even a prayer of deliverance, to open their heart. Indeed, only the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, leads us to spiritual maturity, and gives us the fear of God and the self-discipline to obey the Word of God. 🕯