

25th Sunday 2018 (B)

I hope you were listening attentively to the readings for today.

What if I told you that the readings contain three secrets to a happy life?

Would you pay attention? I think most of us would.

We all want to be happy, don't we? I don't know of anyone who doesn't want to be happy. Not only that, I believe that God wants us to be happy.

What is happiness? The dictionary definition is: a state of wellbeing and contentment.

How do we attain a state of wellbeing and contentment? What must we do to be happy and what must we avoid doing?

Our readings today reveal three secrets to a happy life.

Let's start with the second reading from the letter of St. James. I love St. James. He is clear, direct and practical. Today we read that jealousy and selfish ambition are the source of unhappiness or as he names it "disorder." When our lives are in disorder we can't be happy. As a matter of fact, disorder in our lives causes us to be miserable and unhappy.

So, the first secret to a happy life is to remove jealousy and selfish ambition from our lives. Jealousy and selfish ambition are sinful. They cause an enormous amount of discontent in our lives and lead us to act in very sinful and destructive ways. St. James writes that these two sins cause wars, conflicts, divisions, envy, and even murder.

Therefore, to be happy we must remove jealousy and selfish ambition from our lives. That is the first step to true happiness. But how do we do this?

Jealousy and selfish ambition are based in fear and insecurity. When we are feeling afraid and insecure, then we begin to envy others and covet what they have. So, to remove jealousy and selfish ambition from our lives we must have a healthy and humble sense of ourselves.

What do I mean by this? Simply put, we must love and accept ourselves as we are with all of our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts and faults, and our successes and failures. We need to see ourselves as God sees us and to love ourselves despite our human imperfections.

When we do this, we will stop comparing ourselves to others, which is always dangerous. We will not need to compete with others. We will be satisfied with who we are and what we have.

I am not saying that we should not desire to improve ourselves or to strive to be better human beings. We should always strive to be better human beings. Each of us is a work in progress. Jesus calls us to be perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. This is hard work and it will take us a lifetime to accomplish. We are called to be perfect, whole, and holy. This is called HOLY ambition.

The Gospel for today provides us with two additional secrets to a truly happy life. The first involves suffering and the second involves service to others. In our Gospel passage Jesus told his apostles that he would be handed over, killed and be raised from the dead. St. Mark writes that the apostles did not understand what Jesus was telling them and they were afraid to ask him questions. They were confused because their version of the Messiah was victory and triumph not suffering and death.

Often we also think that our lives should be about victory and triumph not suffering and death. And yet we know, deep down, that suffering and death are a part of human life. At some point in our lives we are going to suffer and there will be a day, for each of us, that will be our last day here on earth.

Fear of suffering and death can and will cause depression, anxiety, and a great deal of unhappiness. There will always be some negative feelings about suffering and death. We can't help be afraid of pain and anxious about death. If we want to be truly happy we must confront our fear of suffering and death and come to an acceptance that it is an undeniable part of life. A healthy and realistic view of life and the reality of suffering and death will help us to be happy and even joyful. A healthy acceptance of suffering and death can even lead us to see suffering as a necessary part of our human growth and maturity. There are some things that can only be learned through suffering. Suffering can even be viewed as a gift that makes us more perfectly human, whole, and holy. Death, as scary as it might be, is the doorway into the next and best phase of our lives — eternal life with God who loves us more than we can imagine.

Finally, the third secret to a happy life is service of others. Jesus told his apostles very clearly that following him requires serving others. If you want to be first in the Kingdom of God you must be the servant of all. Notice that Jesus did not say servant of some. He said servant of all. And he made an additional point that we should serve the least of all. We might find it easy to serve people who can pay us back or say nice things to us. But what about those who cannot pay us back or even thank us, like children? We are called to serve everyone, especially the least powerful among us — children, the elderly, the sick, the poor, the marginalized, and all those who are rejected by society.

Serving others has the power to bring us not just happiness but joy. When we help others we experience the joy of giving of ourselves. Serving others makes us more perfectly human. God created us for love. When we serve others we make our love visible and tangible. Service of others is love in action and it is the third secret to a happy life.

Accepting and loving ourselves as God does. Seeing suffering and death as part of life that can lead to personal growth and maturity. Serving others, especially, those who have no way of paying us back. These are the secrets to a truly happy life.

May God grant you peace and happiness!