

ZOOM Q & A. Session (2 Dec. 2022)

Q. 1 - How can I discern the voice of God amidst all the temptations and noises in our daily life?

- In general, we must try to move away at once from all kinds of temptation: to do a bad action, to judge negatively, to gossip....When it is certain temptations, like sexual thoughts, we must cut short at once and move on to do other things, get busy, take a shower, or just say an ejaculation: Jesus, save me! Mary most pure, help me! Don't linger and play with these temptations. Run away at once. The devil is very smart and knows our weak tendencies and emotions. When we have too much free time and our minds are empty, the devil at once enters to put bad thoughts. He is stronger than we are, but God is even stronger, so we must turn to the Lord at once for help.

- Arrange fixed time each day to get away from noises for a time of silence in order to calm our emotions, talk to the Lord and listen to Him. We can think and discern better when we are calm and in God's presence.

Q. 2 – How to help people to stay happy when facing unexpected circumstances?

- Listen to them sympathetically, without trying to talk too much or to give quick advice. Help to carry their sufferings together with them.

- Give them time to overcome their emotions, while letting them feel your closeness, support and understanding.

- We can pray together with them and encourage them to pray to the Lord and to trust Him. Remember the "Prayer for Serenity".

- Remember that we cannot remove everyone's suffering. This is part of our life situation, so encourage them to place all these troubles into the hands of God, who alone can help and save us. He is the only Saviour; we are not. Besides, suffering is not always something bad. It can help us to be stronger in our faith after we have overcome it with prayer and endurance.

Q.3– How to find real joy instead of happiness? - First of all, it is necessary to make a distinction between the two things:

- Happiness is something that is passing, is temporary whether it is a pleasant feeling that comes from inside us or is caused by an external thing (a good result, a delicious meal, a moment of praise, even a sexual experience...). Usually it is something centred on myself, on ME and my glory; I, Me & MYSELF.

- True Joy – True joy is "true" just because it comes from a deeper level, and can exist even in the midst of pain, suffering and tears. It is not something selfish, centred on oneself, but is always something that has God as its focus and goal. The martyrs died with joy in their hearts because they knew that their witness would give glory to God. They knew in that losing something of this

earth, they would gain something higher, heavenly, and for all eternity. It is something lasting; so the passing pain is endured with peace and serenity of heart.

- I believe that when we understand the difference between happiness and true joy, then we will also know better how to find the real joy and not give so much importance to a passing happiness that soon ends. We will be more attentive to dwell on what is focused on God and His glory, instead of focusing on our passing satisfaction and glory, and we will act accordingly.

Q. 4 - How to define Joy and Gratitude?

Joy is as I explained above. When we experience this joy while suffering, we realize that it is something higher than our ordinary human level which does not naturally make us feel joy when we suffer. But now, since we are experiencing joy even in the midst of pain and suffering, then we recognize it as something coming from Above, from a Power that is greater than our human weakness, that it is in fact a gift from God Himself who offers it to us. Only when we can recognize and understand that it is a power and strength that is not coming from ourselves, then we cannot help saying “Thank You” to our great God, who so generously makes us strong with a strength that is supernatural. Then our heart becomes filled with **Gratitude**. Therefore, we feel grateful when we realize that this joy in suffering is, in fact, a free and precious gift that we have been given by a God who loves us unconditionally and without measure. Gratitude is the result of recognizing the gifts of God in our lives.

Q. 5 – How to remain motivated with Covid and Aging happening at the same time?

- Aging is something natural and unavoidable, and should be something we prepare for during our mid-life, or even earlier, trying to understand the effects of sickness and aging on our body, maybe even on the mind. We can start learning what to do to take care of people who are aging, and all the other illnesses that could come as a result of advancing age, so that we would not be taken by surprise when this happens. Know also that, if we are lucky to live till old age, death is the natural door that opens us to a new life which we all want to attain after all, even if death can cause some fear or uncertainty, because it is always our first and last time to experience it! If we strengthen our relationship with God with the passing of the year, and we try to live an honest and good life as far as we can with God’s grace, our faith and trust in Him will sustain us during that last period, even though a bit of uncertainty and fear may be felt very naturally.

If the Covid happens at the same time, of course it could be a bit more challenging, but it is like many other diseases. Besides, it is now getting less dangerous if we have taken the necessary precautions for this illness, like the vaccinations and masks, with extra prudence in all our outings and contacts with people. Some people already consider the Covid 19 as similar to the annual flu’, or cancer, etc. – diseases that are all around us and we cannot really avoid them completely.

If we believe in God’s love and care for us and the positive meaning of death, and if we are careful to take the ordinary precautions and make use of all the help we can get, we would find the

motivation to live our lives as fully as possible, day by day, without being reckless in exposing ourselves unnecessarily. Some sacrifice is always necessary if we want to live with safety. And when our time comes, we just pass from one life to a greater and happier one, even without Covid, or cancer, or any other type of diseases and sufferings! We may just die a natural death. What is important is to live a full and good life today, while we are still here.

Q. 6/7 – What are some good ways to maintain joy and gratitude daily while being around a negative and toxic culture, etc.? How to be joyful in the midst of continuous trials and sufferings?

These are some of the ways that could help:

- If we don't want to dirty our shoes, we avoid walking in the mud even though we see it in front and around us. We try to avoid all this dirt!
- Make it a frequent habit to make a list of all our daily gifts, especially when we are feeling the pressure of negativity.
- Ask the Lord in prayer to help us see and interpret things as He sees them, and not believe what everybody else and the fake news present to us every day.
- Take care of our health with sufficient time for prayer, sleep, nourishment and exercise. A healthy body will help to keep in us a healthy mind and attitude.
- Avoid conversing with persons who are always very negative about everything, especially if they are not ready to listen to any other person's opinions that are positive.
- Sometimes when we are feeling depressed, or have negative thoughts, it could help just to go and take a shower and have a good sleep. Next morning we might be seeing things differently already, with more hope and serenity.
- When we see something as being very negative, always say at once: "Thank God that at least it is not as bad as.....!"
- Sharing our preoccupations with some mature person of faith who may also be a good mentor and support at times.

Q. 8 - Gratitude does not seem apparent among the younger generations y and z. How do we instill and nurture that in our children, or is it necessary to show gratitude anyway?

Yes, first of all, it is always good, even necessary, to show gratitude. It is very helpful to be aware and to express in words our gratitude for all the gifts we have received from God, as it is also a good practice to thank anyone when a favour is done for us or when we receive a gift. Why is it necessary? Because it will influence our thoughts and attitudes towards life and towards people. It will help us to appreciate these benefactors who show kindness and generosity to us, and will also help us to feel that we are loved and appreciated when such kindness is shown to us. Our greatest Benefactor is God our Father who daily showers so many gifts upon us, showing His great care for us, His beloved children, even when we don't deserve them.

It may be true that the younger generations may not be so aware of this good practice. I believe that this habit and awareness should be instilled in them when they are young children by the families themselves. Each time a favour is done, or a gift is offered to the child, teach him or her to say "Thank you". Isn't this what you teach your little kids to do even when they are very tiny? The schools should then follow up with promoting this mentality of gratefulness on all occasions, by reminding the students of this respectful behaviour. Besides, we parents, adults, teachers, have to practise this good habit naturally and faithfully ourselves, so that the children/students can learn from the example of our behaviour, otherwise they might feel that we are imposing on them what we ourselves do not practise. And this respect should be shown not only to those who are in authority or to elderly people, but to every person, even to young children, to our servants, to the poor, to the ignorant, to every single person. Children should learn from us from the very beginning of their lives that every person has the dignity of being God's beloved child and should be shown respect and gratitude.

In some schools there is a laudable practice of an annual Day of Gratitude to all the Teachers/Staff, and even a Day of Gratitude to our Minor Staff, helping them do the cleaning of the classrooms by the students themselves for that one day. This should help to create a greater awareness and the beautiful virtue of gratitude, and not to simply take things for granted for the services done to us.

Q. 9 - How do you personally cultivate joy and gratitude in general and when you are suffering? What are some of the bible verses that you use to inspire you or help you seek joy and gratitude? (This is a question addressed to me personally!)

Well, I usually begin my day, when I wake up, by thanking the Lord for the gift of another new day of life, offering to Him all that will happen and all that I will encounter and do on that day. I ask for His help and thank Him in advance for His graces and support.

Sometimes when things may look a bit difficult, I take time to talk to the Lord and to remember some of Jesus' promises like: "I am with you always"; "Do not be afraid, it is I!"; "I have conquered the world!" and so on. I also try not to continue dwelling on negative thoughts, but to ask the Lord for greater faith and trust in Him.

There are so many sentences in the Bible, especially in the 4 Gospels, which I would warmly recommend you to find a bit of time to read, about a chapter or 2 a day, to become more familiar with Jesus' words and life. Try also to avoid communicating too much with people who tend to be always negative in their interpretations and ideas, because we can be more easily influenced by negative ideas than by positive ones. When you can, you could add something positive instead of agreeing to their negative interpretations, although this may not make you very popular among such persons, but it is better to be popular with God than with the world.

The Psalms in the Old Testament are very beautiful – we should read all of them slowly, as well as all of the New Testament. When we don't know how to talk to God in prayer, these psalms can be used as a help to our prayers. There we can find an answer for any situation in our lives: for example,
When we are sad, lonely, fearful and discouraged (Ps. 23, 27, 34); Matthew Ch. 14:22-32, etc.
When we worry too much: Matt. 6:19-34
When we don't know how to express Praise and Thanksgiving: Ps 100, 103, 139, 145...
When we forget to count our blessings: Ps 103; Secret to Happiness: Colossians 3:12-17, and so on.
There is a great treasure in the Holy Bible, especially the New Testament, which is always the Word of God, His message of love to us. Give it a try, and you will discover how much they can be of help to us in our spiritual growth!