

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

Jeremiah was a bullfrog
Was a good friend of mine
I never understood a single word he said

But I helped him a-drink his wine

And he always had some mighty fine wine—

Three Dog Night, "Joy to the World"

As often happens, Father Trummer's homily this week struck a note with me. The main theme was recognition of joy as being an integral part of life, both within the church and out.

It just so happens that I recently learned a bit about Saint Therese of Lisieux, and I resolved to try to incorporate her "little way" into my everyday activities in 2026. Without going too far down a theological rabbit hole, in her autobiography, "Story of a Soul," St. Therese revealed that she had always wanted to be a saint, but felt that her life was too ordinary when compared to the exploits of those who had come before her, and so she resolved to find joy, holiness and virtue in the everyday tasks and situations she faced.

As one who is given to finding great pleasure in the simplest of things, this philosophy has really resonated with me as of late. A good meal, a good conversation, a certain song lyric, and so many other things bring joy to my heart and so it was easy for me to find a connection. Of course, I couldn't begin to compare to her.

When diagnosed with terminal tuberculosis at the age of 24, she is said to have cried tears of joy at the thought that her passing would hasten her time to see the face of God. As Mrs. HLS will attest, I'm a big wimp when it comes to any sort of ailment. A common cold is enough to send me to bed for days, so I'm pretty sure I wouldn't do

good when facing something so serious.

In another famous example of a saint continuing to express joy in the face of a terrible situation, St. Paul exhorted the Philippians to "Rejoice in the Lord, always. I say it again. Rejoice!" while being imprisoned in Rome. It is widely believed that Emperor Nero had him beheaded soon after, yet even knowing his eventual fate, he continued to express his irrepressible joy and trust in God.

In World War II, Saint Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Franciscan Friar who was executed in the Auschwitz concentration camp after he famously volunteered to take the place of another prisoner who had been marked for death.

After a prisoner escaped, the deputy camp commander selected 10 prisoners to be executed via starvation, and Saint Maximilian volunteered to take the place of one of the chosen 10. Once in the starvation cell, Kolbe led the other inmates in prayer and the singing of hymns. After two weeks without food or water, Kolbe and 3 other prisoners remained alive, frustrating the SS so much that they chose to execute them via injections of Carboic Acid. It is said that Saint Maximilian held out his left arm in defiance when his turn came.

Three Saints.

Three of hundreds of examples of people being able to find joy in the face of horrific circumstances.

I suppose if they, along with one Amphibian Oenophile, can be joyful, it shouldn't be too hard for the rest of us to do the same, right?

I resolve to keep on trying. Joy to the World, indeed.

Pastor Stahl's Weekly Message of Faith



Hello Everyone!
I hope everyone has had a Happy New Year!

The weather has been crazy hasn't it? Last Sunday it was 67 degrees, then a couple of days later it was 27!

Colds and flu are running rampant. Everyone stay warm! Each day passes is one day closer to Spring!

In the life of the church, we are now in the Season of Epiphany.

Epiphany begins with the visit of the Wise Men to the Child Jesus. Usually we put the Wise Men in the Nativity Scene at the Manger in Bethlehem, but it took them much longer to find Jesus.

The Shepherds out in the field came that night to see the Baby Jesus, then went out and told everyone what they had seen and heard.

The Wise Men came from the East, probably ancient Persia, and followed the Star that guided them to the Christ Child. It took them probably two years or more to find Jesus. "When they saw the Star, they were filled with great joy! They entered the house and saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him.

They opened their treasure chests and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." (Matthew 2:10, 11) The Wise Men worshiped the Lord and gave Him gifts. They let nothing stand in their way of finding Jesus, even if it took two years or more. We should let nothing stop us from finding Jesus and worshipping Him. We should give Him our gifts, even the gift of our lives.

One of our favorite Christmas movies is "It's a Wonderful Life", starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. It is the story of a man named George Bailey, who lives in the town of Bedford Falls. He dreams all his life of leaving town and going exploring all over the world, but circumstances keep him in Bedford Falls his entire life. He is depressed and is just about to end it all when an angel intervenes. The angel's name is Clarence, and he

shows George what the town would be like if he had never been born. All the people that George helped in his life were much worse off without him. The town had become seedy and rundown, looking nothing like the town that George had grown up in. His wife Mary, without George in her life, never married. He realized that he really did have a wonderful life, and all the people that he had helped were better off with George Bailey in their lives.

Imagine what our world would be like if Jesus had never been Born:

Mary and Joseph would have married, raised their family in Nazareth, but something would have been missing in their lives.

The Wise Men would have remained in their distant land, looking at the stars but never finding The STAR. The Shepherds would have remained out in the field, watching their sheep but never finding the Lamb of God.

Peter would have remained a fisherman, with an emptiness in his heart that a net full of fish wouldn't have satisfied. The woman caught in adultery in John 8 would have been stoned to death.

The woman at the well in John 4 would have endured the gossip and rumors of the other women in town. She probably would have left town, afraid of the rumors and ashamed of herself. No forgiveness, no peace of mind.

The guests at the wedding feast in John 2 would have remained out of wine.

Lazarus would have died and remained in his grave.

Mary Magdalene would have had to deal with the demons inside of her for the rest of her life.

And poor little Zacchaeus would have remained up the tree, unloved, unwelcome, unforgiven.

But Thank God, Jesus Did come to earth and our lives are Blessed because of Him!

God Bless all of you!
Pastor Jeff Stahl
Countryside and Ogden United Methodist Churches

Ramblings from The Village Idiot

A few decades ago, ago, a neighbor in Colorado Springs told me about a traffic ticket he'd gotten. Speeding in a school zone. The thing was, the reduced speed limit was only after 7AM, and it was before 7AM. Enough before, that he was able to get to a gas station, and show the attendant his ticket before 7AM. The attendant was willing to testify that he had seen the ticket before 7AM, and thus before the time of issuance written on when the case came up in traffic court, the cop and the witness were both there. The judge dismissed the ticket. But misstating the time of issuance in order to create a violation our of thin air is serious misconduct. The judge demanded an explanation.

Which the cop provided. He - and a bunch of his fellow officers - had been given ticket quotas. They had to issue X number of traffic tickets a week, or they would be punished. If they weren't seeing enough actual violations, they would have to write bogus tickets to meet their quota.

The intrinsic unjustness of this sort of thing is self-evident. Nobody deserves the inconvenience of appearing in traffic court, or of being fined, or of having their insurance rates go up through no fault of their own, but because some cop felt compelled to issue a certain number of tickets. Which reminds me...

There is a bronze plaque on the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, with a poem by Emma Lazarus entitled "The New Colossus" engraved on it. We used to sing the last part of it in grade school as a patriotic song. It was the message of Lady Liberty to the world:

Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

But America no longer represents

liberty or opportunity to "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Liberty and opportunity are reserved for the white, the well-connected, and the well-heeled.

So - What's all this got to do with ticket quotas?

Ticket quotas have made the big time. They have graduated from turning people into numbers who face possible fines, to how many will actually be thrown in jail. The planning of every performance of the ICE Follies Road Show includes arrest quotas. They are ordered to lock up X number of people as part of each run of the show. The quota numbers are to support the Big Lie that we are undergoing an "invasion" by an "army" of "bad people." The Admin's flaks can say, "Hey - look at how many of them we just arrested!" But please, don't look at how many of them are being quickly ordered released because, well, they were locked up simply to meet an arrest quota.

And now, DOJ has issued quotas for the number of "denaturalization cases" - that is, the number of naturalized US citizens it wants to deprive of citizenship. Never mind that this can only be done for lying about a material fact in applying for citizenship, and a few other reasons which apply only rarely. Never mind that these reasons don't include "wrong" country of origin or color of skin. There's a case quota to meet.

The purpose of these arrest and case quotas is as self-evident as their unjustness - they are part of the Administration's agenda to scapegoat those least able to fight injustices against them, and to punish anyone who criticizes its policies or its leader.

Maybe our current president can show his devotion to liberty by ordering that the entire Statue of Liberty be gilded, thereby making the "lamp beside the golden door" less conspicuous. If that's not enough, he can have his name put on it.

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John 1:1-18
New International Version
The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him

nothing was made that has been made.

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

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