

Lift Up Your Hearts



Christopher News Notes

“LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.” Those words from the Mass reflect Jesus’ teaching that we can choose joy in our lives by lifting up our hearts to the God of love who created us. He asks us to purge ourselves of negative emotions which only serve to rob us of happiness. That doesn’t mean we won’t have crosses to bear, but it does mean that true joy can be found, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Choose Joy

True joy is not dictated by external circumstances or by an escape into drugs or fast living. Rather, it begins with the way we think—and it reaches fulfillment through the grace of God. The Lord called upon His followers to choose a set of attitudes and beliefs that would liberate them from the pitfalls of resentment, bitterness, spite, vindictiveness, envy, jealousy, and hatred. He told them to love one another and choose a way of life that would increase their own inner joy. We have that power. Deciding to follow the supreme law of love is the first step. The harmony and joy of the whole community depends on each one of us.

“One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that [Jesus] answered them well, he asked Him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

—Mark 12:28-31

Trust the Words of Jesus

Rationalists insist that nothing in Scripture should be accepted unless the mind first determines it to be reasonable. They reduce the supernatural act of faith to logic. The First Vatican Council (1869-70) firmly rejected this proposition, asserting that the act of faith is supernatural in origin. Sacred Scripture is trusted not because of the powers of reason, but because of the divine authority of Jesus Christ, who said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled... Believe in God, believe also in Me... I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 14:1 and 15:11)

Does Jesus imply that we are supposed to put on a happy face no matter what? Are we to pretend we are happy even in times of economic depression and unemployment? Are we supposed to feel good when someone betrays or insults us? Not at

Be Not Anxious

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”
—Matthew 6:34

There are many causes of anxiety: the fear of financial ruin, the fear of becoming sick, and the fear of death, to name a few. The death of a loved one always causes anxiety because we tend to confront our own mortality in times of grief. And grief can cause extreme emotional pain. But joy can prevail over sorrow, even if it doesn’t always eliminate it.

Consider this story from Joan from Brooklyn, New York: “When my husband died a few years ago, I felt like I wanted to die too. We were so close, so in love. How could I go on without him? I talked it over with God and told Him how I felt as I cried many tears. But God let me know that He wanted me to live because my work on earth was not yet finished. He reminded me that as much as I loved Donald, my life was separate from his.

“God was right, because although I still love and miss my husband, my best friend, I’m no longer unhappy because I’m busy reaching out, trying to do God’s will for me. In the process of healing and growing, I have become a joyful and fulfilled person. Instead of giving up, I gave in and became the person God wanted me to be. I’m sure God is pleased because others will now see His light shining in me and through me.”

all. We never have to force feelings of any kind. What we are asked to do is think as Jesus did. Feelings follow thoughts.

For instance, Jesus urged us to forgive others, even if the harm done was unjust or unprovoked. We obey not because it feels right, but because He asks it. BeFORE we feel like it, we GIVE forgiveness. We FORE-GIVE. On the other hand, if we refuse to forgive, bad feelings can stay with us. Forgiveness is in the will. Good feelings will gradually displace the emotional pain, but this takes time. To be healed, one has to trust the truthfulness of Sacred Scripture, whether or not it appeals to one’s sense of logic.

Learn to Forgive

“Peter came and said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”

—Matthew 18:21-22

Georgine from Lawrence, Kansas, wrote: “After my

marriage failed, I was angry, bitter, and filled with resentment and hatred for my ex-husband. I went through all the questions and feelings, ‘How could You let this happen to me, Lord?’ and ‘Where are You, Lord, now that I need You?’”

“Somewhere along the healing road that I was traveling,” continued Georgine, “it became apparent that I needed to express myself to my Father in heaven, as a child of His truly would. I cried, sobbed, moaned, and groaned. I beat my breast and asked for forgiveness for the feelings I had toward my ex-husband and for the anger. I prayed aloud one sleepless night, ‘Father, forgive me. I want to trust and believe and have faith like a child, but right now I don’t. Please help me to find life after a failed marriage. And help me really mean what I am about to say: I want to truly wish my ex and his new wife all the best that life has to offer. You know I don’t mean this now, but I want to.’”

Jesus never suggested that it would be easy. The spirit of forgiveness doesn’t always flow from warm, cozy feelings. It begins with faith in Jesus Christ and translates into the will to forgive.

The process of healing can be agonizing, but perseverance can bring peace of soul.

Return Good for Evil

"I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
—Matthew 5:44

When Jesus told us to love our enemies, He challenged us to throw logic to the winds. By trusting Him, we begin to see things differently. Some people see enemies where none exist. There may be no malice or injustice in the situation, but simply a conflict of personalities or needs. In such cases, greater understanding and a little time can rid us of ill feelings.

However, there are times when no excuses can be made for the cruelty of others. That's when we need an unwavering faith in the words of Jesus. With the help of grace, all things are possible.

Even modern psychology acknowledges that human beings can rise above natural instincts. Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl suffered misery and devastation during World War II as a prisoner in the Nazi death camps. His entire family was wiped out, except for his sister. Despite this injustice, he chose to reject his internal bitterness.

To keep his mind free of hatred, he made a case study of prisoners who maintained their dignity in the face of persecution. "We who lived in concentration camps," Frankl wrote in his memoirs, "can remember those who walked through the huts

comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken away from a person but one thing: the last human freedom—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

No one can make you a mean and bitter person unless you give them the power to do so. You have the power to choose your own responses, and you alone are responsible for your own inner happiness. Whether you become bitter or peaceful is your choice.

Do Not Judge

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."
—Matthew 7:1-5

If we are to love our neighbor, we cannot at the same time condemn that neighbor. Better to leave all judgment to God. Better to have a heart full of forgiveness and compassion. Those who are quick to judge complicate their own mental equilibrium. They may have good reason to judge another harshly, but in doing so they open themselves to the spirit of meanness and vindictiveness.

Not everyone is strong enough or wise enough to rise to this heroic degree of virtue. But St. Augustine had this advice: "Do what you can do, and pray for what you cannot yet do." So starting today, do your best to lift up your heart to God and follow Jesus' advice. These important steps will help you choose joy in whatever circumstances you find yourself—and ultimately change your life for the better.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

President: Mary Ellen Robinson
Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

The Christophers

5 Hanover Square, New York, NY 10004
212-759-4050, ext. 241

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

Christopher News Note 646

ISBN: 8755-69601

*This is an edited version of the classic
Christopher News Note "Lift Up Your Hearts."*