

I Sing Because I'm Happy

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.
[Psalm 19:14]

Our theme for this year's parish weekend at Shrine Mont is: *Again, I Say Rejoice!* And, the theme for this evening's service of Evening Prayer is: *I Sing Because I'm Happy*.

As this evening's lessons proclaim, we as Christians believe in the Risen Lord. And despite any trials and tribulations that might lie in our path, we have much to be happy about and many reasons to rejoice; because God is in our corner and Jesus Christ has our backs.

For me, I am happy because I know that I have been blessed. This is a message and attitude that my maternal grandmother reinforced with me when I was a young child growing up. After my grandfather passed from this life to the next, my grandmother moved in to live with my mother, father, sisters, and me. We were blessed to have her live with us and help my parents raise me and my sisters. In addition to the fact that her approach to child-rearing exactly mirrored those of my parents, she was very religious and contributed greatly to my spiritual development. My grandmother and I found time for prayer and Bible study almost every day. She was a member of our church's choir, and one of her favorite hymns was *I Sing Because I'm Happy*. Don't tell Richard, but when I was in high school, I was a member of a Gospel choir and my choir loved this hymn and sang it often. Today, I would describe this hymn as my grandmother's operating philosophy and theme song. My grandmother was a very positive person who had a way of putting a positive spin on everything; and since we spent a lot of time together, her spirituality, and attitude about and approach to life have rubbed off on me; and I too am blessed.

We are all blessed – so despite any trials and tribulations that might lie in our path – we should be happy. And, as we heard in today's reading from St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gave us the Beatitudes or *blessings*, to proclaim God's favor on those who aspire to live under His rule. As I was preparing today's homily, I came across an article that suggested meanings for each of the Beatitudes that I would like to share with you.

- ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;*** which suggests that we should be satisfied with what we have and share those things with others because God wants us to.
- ***Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted;*** reminding us to comfort those who are suffering and to help others feel better about themselves after a loss.

- ***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth***; a reminder that humility is a true sense of who we are and that we should cast ego out of the way.
- ***Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled***; an admonition to do what is right and fair for everyone or, put another way: *What would Jesus do?*
- ***Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy***; a reminder about the need to forgive those who trespass against us and to look for ways to show kindness to others.
- ***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God***; reminding us to do what is right, simply because we know it is the right thing to do.
- ***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God***; an admonition to do everything we can to try to bring God's peace to the world and to conduct ourselves in such a way that people can see Jesus in us.
- ***Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***; encouraging us to be willing to stand up for God's laws, even if we are ridiculed or insulted.

I believe that we here at Grace Church have been blessed and have much for which to rejoice and be thankful. While many among us may be sad at the prospect of Father Malm's retirement and may have some trepidations about what lies ahead as we call an Interim Rector and enter a period of discernment leading to the call of a new Rector, I believe that all will be well, because God is in our corner, and Jesus Christ has our backs. Grace Church is a wonderful place. We have an excellent staff, very strong and capable parish lay-leadership, superb membership, and wonderful and vibrant programs and ministries.

My view is reinforced by my experience when I was the Senior Warden of an Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, where a long-serving and beloved Rector announced that she was resigning and moving to Texas with her husband, who had lost his job in Philadelphia and had accepted a new position in Texas. I still remember the meeting the Vestry had with our Bishop on Saturday, February 1, 2003, when Mother Marge announced that she would be leaving, and then excused herself from the meeting while the Bishop walked the Vestry through the process involved with calling an Interim Rector, and the discernment process that would follow leading to calling a new Rector. The date of this meeting stands out even more, because while the Vestry was meeting with the Bishop, the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated during atmospheric reentry killing all of the crew members aboard. I learned of this when I went to the Rectory after the meeting to confer with Mother Marge, and found her in tears as she was praying for the astronauts and the news account was playing on the television in the background.

Like Grace Church, St. Luke's – although a much smaller parish – was blessed with great staff, strong lay leaders, wonderful members, and great programs and ministries. We were blessed to be able to call a wonderful Interim Rector who shepherded us through the discernment process that resulted in our being able to call a superb Rector who helped the St. Luke's to continue to grow and flourish and who is still serving there today.

I also vividly remember tears flowing from my eyes as I knelt at the rail to receive Communion from Mother Marge on her last Sunday at St. Luke's. They were a mix of tears of sadness because Mother Marge would be moving on but they were also tears of joy because I knew that Mother Marge, who had already been called to serve at a parish in Texas, and her husband would be secure, and that St. Luke's would be all right.

Grace Church will be all right, too. So now, and in the weeks to come, are opportunities to reflect on and celebrate the ministry of Father Malm among us. I still vividly remember sitting at my desk in my study at home in late June when the e-mail popped up from Amy with the letter from Fr. Malm announcing his retirement. After I read Fr. Malm's letter, I did two things. First, I had been in communication with Bishop Goff concerning an offer I had made to provide business consulting services to our Diocese. In responding to her e-mail on that topic, I took the opportunity to let her know how blessed we have been here at Grace Church to have Fr. Malm as our Rector and my gratitude for all of the many ways he has supported me and my family as a pastor. I also asked the Bishop to pray for Grace as we proceed with calling and Interim Rector and in the discernment process leading to calling a new Rector. Second, I sent Fr. Malm an e-mail to personally express my gratitude to him for all he has done for me and my family.

This weekend is also one of a number of opportunities we will have in the coming weeks to celebrate the ministry of Father Malm among us. So, take a moment this weekend to give thanks for Father Malm's ministry among us.

In the words of our opening hymn this evening:

I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He's watching me.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.