

**Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B  
(Sept. 3, 2006)**

**God's Delight**

You may remember that we had been reading continuously from St. Mark's Gospel until three weeks ago when we had a brief interlude about the Bread of Life, the great gift of the Lord to all of us, his body and blood in the form of bread and wine. Today as you just heard we are back to St. Mark.

You may also remember that at the beginning of St. Mark's Gospel we heard about the Baptism of Jesus and how God the Father said of him, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What this says to me is that God looks on Jesus and takes delight in him, much as we are told in the first chapter of Genesis that God looked on all that had been made and saw that it was good. God delighted in the work of creation.

I don't think we reflect enough on God's delight. Nor do we reflect on the delight that Jesus experienced in his life. Jesus obviously delighted in the simple pleasures of life. And he delighted in helping others enjoy those pleasures. John tells us in his Gospel that Jesus' first miracle was to provide wine at a wedding party for the delight of the guests and also to prevent the embarrassment of the bridegroom. He obviously delighted in helping people. And it gave him great pleasure to make other people happy. Think of how he healed the sick and fed the hungry. Think of the many times Jesus is present with friends enjoying a good meal; think especially of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, his very special friends, and the delight he found in their company

Now I hope this doesn't sound blasphemous but I think that Jesus liked to have a good time. In the Gospels we enter into the joy and delight of God made flesh in Jesus by celebrating, eating, and drinking. In Matthew's Gospel he is accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (11.19). He scandalizes by his festivity. The Russian author Dostoevsky says, "It was not people's grief but their joy that Christ visited. He worked his first miracle to help human gladness." (*Brothers Karamazov*, trans, A. H. Andrews, p. 436.) This was not a duty for him, like politicians kissing

babies. He took pleasure in the company of sinners. He did not just “love” them because he was obliged to: he took pleasure in them

There is a very important lesson in this for us. Since we are the Body of Christ, we, too, are to delight in the company of others; we, too, are to find joy and happiness in the simple pleasures of life. Pope Benedict XVI once wrote, “To be called to the love of God is to have a vocation for happiness. To become happy is a ‘duty’ that is just as human and natural as it is supernatural.” (*The Yes of Jesus Christ*, p. 98.)

In our Gospel today we meet some people who do not seem to have caught this notion of our vocation to happiness. They reproach Jesus because he and his followers do not observe certain restrictions of the law. Jesus has some pretty harsh things to say about these people who are constantly trying to find him doing something wrong. The rules and regulations they are talking about are human rules and as such are relatively unimportant and can be ignored if something more important is at stake. Jesus reprimands them because they are fixated on these human rules to the extent that they ignore the law of God which is much more important, the law we heard about in the first reading

Today’s liturgy attempts to give us a balanced approach to this whole question of law. The first reading from Deuteronomy sees it as positive and life-giving. This is the law of God that is given to us for our well-being, to help make our world a better place to be. It is the law that brings joy, the kind of joy and delight that we see in Jesus. It’s the law that is rooted in the love of God and is an expression of that love and helps us to understand what our response to that love must be.

The religious leaders who reproach Jesus do so not so much from a respect for law as from a desire to catch him doing something wrong. There is no love here, and so their observance of the law has nothing to do with what it means to be a good Jew. It almost seems that they are not happy to see him finding joy in life and in the company of his disciples. They are like the definition of a puritan that G. K. Chesterton once gave: A puritan he says is a person who is constantly worried that someone somewhere is having a good time.

So what’s the best way to be a good Christian? We begin by doing what Jesus asks us to do, love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

St. James summarizes it very succinctly in the second reading when he tells us that the spirit of religion is holiness of life and care for the needy. Above all of course, as Pope Benedict tells us, Learn to be happy and to enjoy life with its pleasures. After all, Jesus did!