

**Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
(July 4, 2010)**

**A Job Well Done**

Travel tips! That's what one commentator calls today's Gospel. Travel tips. Well, we'll come back to those travel tips in a couple of minutes. But first I want to take a larger view of our three readings because I find a common theme there that we would all do well to ponder together today.

And that theme is joy. The joy that accompanies fulfillment, accomplishment, a job well-done.

The first reading is from the last chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. The exiles have come home. They are rebuilding their city, Jerusalem, and their temple. Their joy knows no bounds. And Isaiah uses some beautiful imagery to try to describe how they feel. They are like children, being nursed at their mother's breast. The prophet can find no metaphor more expressive of the contentment of the people, and he goes on to say what God has said to him, that God is like a mother, comforting her children. It's one of the many feminine images of God that occur in the Hebrew Scriptures. It all represents the fulfillment of their dreams of deliverance from captivity and exile and so they are overjoyed.

In the Gospel the disciples come back from their first missionary assignment, exuberant, enthusiastic, because their work has been successful, a job well-done. "Master," they say, "even the demons are subject to us in your name." But Jesus tells them not to rejoice simply because demons are subject to them, but rejoice because their names are written in heaven. As good as this is, greater things will follow.

Paul, too, talks about joy in fulfillment, but his perspective is a bit more sobering. He says that his joy comes from the cross of Jesus Christ and his own participation in that cross. According to him nothing else matters. It reminds me a bit of what he says to his good friends, the Philippians. He writes to them from prison, knowing full well that he will probably be put to death for preaching Jesus. But he tell the Philippians that they should rejoice in the Lord and never cease rejoicing, just as he

does because of his great trust and confidence. He is living proof of the possibility of joy even in the face of adversity. What a great faith that is.

Well, I think we all need people like Paul, like Isaiah, like Jesus, people who lift the spirit. We can easily get discouraged when faced with the daily difficulties of our lives. From a global perspective there are major problems in places like Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan. Closer to home there have been scandals in the Church. People who were very enthusiastic after the Second Vatican Council are sometimes disappointed with the seeming retrenchment from that Council's reforms. Others get so bogged down in administrative details that they forget the big picture – the great adventure that this Christian life can be – indeed was intended to be. The basic message of the Gospel is clear: God wants us so badly that God sent his only Son to tell us so. No wonder the first missionaries were given the kind of travel tips we heard a little while ago. They had to move too quickly to carry baggage. Get rid of excess baggage, Jesus tells them. The message is urgent so let nothing stand in the way. Above all, be cheerful and enthusiastic because the message is so wonderful. And that's what they did. We could use a little of that enthusiasm today.

Well, how does all this apply to us who live in or near a city like Washington, who have steady jobs, most of us at least, families to raise and to care for, a thousand different concerns that occupy us on a daily basis? The missionary charge that Jesus gives the seventy-two in the Gospel suggests that even people like us should be prepared to travel light. As committed Christians we should live a little more trustingly than the culture around us, which puts its highest priorities in producing and consuming goods and being entertained and making money. In moderation of course these things are good, even necessary, but when they become so absorbing that they make us forget the more important things, loving God, loving one another, taking care of the weaker members of society, then they become sinful. As committed Christians, our life is to be a challenge to the consumer culture we live in. It should also be a challenge to the violence of the culture we live in.

This is not easy. Jesus realized that. That's why he tells his followers they had to take up their cross every day and follow in his footsteps. Our cross will come precisely in learning how to travel light and to live in such a

way that the people around us will start asking, “Who are these people? Where do they come from and where are they going?” And that’s the kind of cross Paul was talking about, the one in which he found his joy. It’s a joy that can be ours as well.

Today we celebrate the Fourth of July, the day that recalls the noble experiment that began in this nation 234 years ago. What happened then was a challenge to the status quo and to the powers that be. Our Christianity is exactly the same kind of challenge – with one notable exception. Our motivation is love of God and love of neighbor and not personal gain. But our forefathers and foremothers fought for the freedom to live as they saw fit. Our own freedom today and our joy come from a childlike trust, the kind those Israelites had, nestling in the arms of Mother Jerusalem and being comforted by a God who comforts us as a mother comforts her children. It’s the only true joy that can exist. Please God we will be open to it today and every day of our lives.