

Tips for happiness

How do we find happiness? Is there a school that offers happiness courses? Well, I was surprised to find that there *is* such a school ... and not only one! There are more than a hundred universities in the United States that offer courses on happiness.

Time magazine published some research on happiness conducted by one of these universities and the results might be surprising. If we were to ask people what would make them happy, their first response might be "Money!" or "I'd like to be famous!" But when people think more deeply they realise that true happiness is not to be found in money or fame but rather in a positive approach to life and in good relationships with other people.

Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychologist in California, summarised the results of her research in eight tips for finding happiness.

1. Count your blessings.
2. Practise acts of kindness.
3. Savour life's joys.
4. Thank people who help you.
5. Learn to forgive.
6. Invest time and energy in friends and family.
7. Take care of your body.
8. Develop strategies for coping with stress.

These tips come from a secular rather than a religious source, but it is remarkable how similar they are to Christian values. Our faith teaches us that real happiness is not to be found in money, fame or self-indulgence. Searching for happiness along these paths will only bring disappointment. Our faith points to other paths – a focus on people over money, walking humbly in the presence of God, giving thanks for the gifts we have received, being ready to carry the cross of suffering, giving ourselves in service to others. At first sight these paths might not look so attractive, but they are the paths of true happiness.

The Scriptures today present a picture of the early Christian community and one of the main features of this community is *joy*.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that "they shared their food gladly and generously" (Acts 2:46).

In the Letter of St Peter we find that the first Christians had their problems but that through all their trials they remained joyful because of their faith in God's promises. "This is a cause of great joy for you, even though you may for a short time have to bear being plagued by all sorts of trials." (1 Peter 1:6) Even those who had not met Jesus during his earthly life had come to love him and this gave them deep happiness. "You did not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe". (1 Peter 1:8)

Today's gospel tells of Jesus appearing to his followers after his resurrection. Seeing him again brought them great joy. "The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20) The text goes on to say that even those who have not seen Jesus can share in this joy through their faith. "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe." (John 20:29)

May the risen Jesus be with us today and bless us with peace and joy.