



### From A Bishop's Journal (696)

#### “In God's Garden It Is Full of Happiness”

**A**t this Easter time, as it is so well expressed in Psalm 118, we can sing: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.” I don't believe there was a better time for me to launch my fourth book titled [in French] *Au jardin de Dieu, c'est plein de joie* [“In God's Garden It is Full of Happiness”]. I hope the book reflects the great event of Christ's Resurrection, that it reflects the joy that Christ promised us.

#### Not Heaven “Later on”

The book is not about a far-away future. We know very well that heaven shall be bliss forever, a heaven that no eye has seen anything to compare with, that no ear has ever heard of anything as wonderful, a heaven where we shall all enjoy everlasting bliss. I have no trouble imagining that the heaven promised us will be a garden of delight for all. However, my book is more down-to-earth than that. It talks about our land, about the country of my native Saint-Odilon in the Beauce region of Québec province, and it talks about Edmundston, my land of adoption, a happy land. It is the land we inhabit today, the land where we continue to welcome God's many kindnesses, the garden we walk through every day: our family, our relations, our work places and places of leisure, and our cultural milieu.

#### A Controversial Garden

But isn't ours also a land of suffering and violence, a land of wars and hatred? To some young people, the secondary schools they attend are far from happy places; for those faced with major marriage and family problems, life as family is far from being God's garden. When the workplace has become a place of discord, can we still claim that it is God's garden? And if God's garden were our private lives, could we still claim to be God's garden? When everything in life is going bad, when suffering, illness, and death invade our lives, can we still say that God's garden is there? Would we not rather be tempted to say that it is hell on earth? Not so long ago we could still hear people say that life was a “vale of tears.” How, then, can we say that there is much happiness in God's garden?

## **One only Sees with the Heart**

These words from St.-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* come to mind: "What counts is invisible. We only see well with the eyes of the heart." And these words of Jesus: "The kingdom of God is in your midst," and "The coming of God's kingdom cannot be observed. But know this: the kingdom of God is among you." And these wonderful words: But blest are your eyes because they see and blest are yours ears because they hear. Many a prophet and many a saint longed to see what you see but did not see it, to hear what you hear but did not hear it." Despite his ever-present suffering, St. Paul wrote that he was "filled with joy". At the end of a particularly difficult pontificate, Pope Paul VI published for Pentecost 1975, an exhortation on "Christian Joy", a wonderful piece of writing which is still suitable for today, as it speaks of the need we all have for joy and happiness. So, we must reflect more on the reality that is happiness. More than a passing emotion, more than a state of the soul, it is a divine gift. At the heart of our faith, the revelation of the Creator and Saviour God activates unbounded love in us humans. How can we contemplate the creation without proclaiming with the psalm, "My happiness is in the Lord"? Aren't we invited, at the daily liturgy of the hours, to ring out our joy to the Lord: "Come, let us sing to the Lord"? Joy is a treasure we are invited to discover, just as with the kingdom of God. Fruit of the Holy Spirit, joy has its source in God's own heart.

## **Time for Joy**

If the holy scriptures highlight the joys of life, of the Covenant and of the Gospel, we must not surmise that those were the "good old days" and that joy was the private reserve of our ancestors. Even today God gifts us with His joy. He created us and maintains us in existence. He called us to baptism, and made us His people. Jesus gifts us with his Church, with his Spirit, with the sacraments, and even with his mother Mary. Like her, we can sing, "The Lord has done great things for me, and his love is from age to age." There is a Negro Spiritual I like very much, *Nobody Knows*, and its French adaptation reveals to us the joy that can be ours even now: "You are my portion, O Lord, and my inheritance; I have placed my trust in you, my only portion. I think of you day and night, and your hand guides me on. Before you there is only joy, overflowing happiness in your sight, O Lord."

## **Hymn to Joy**

Blessed Mother Teresa, who did not have worldly goods but who lived among the poor "pariahs of society," bequeathed us a beautiful Hymn to Joy: "Joy is prayer, joy is strength, joy is love. God loves the one who gives joyfully. The best way to express our gratitude to God and others is to accept everything with joy. Do not let sorrow overwhelm you to the point where you forget the joy of the Risen Christ. We all aspire to heaven and to God, but we have the power to be in heaven right now. We have only to be happy with God now, in the present moment. But being happy with Him now, means to love as He loves, help as He helps, give as He gives, serve as He serves, save as He saves, being with Him twenty-four hours a day, touching Him in his leper's disguise, in the poor and the

suffering. A joyful heart is the normal consequence of a heart burning with Love. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a sharing in the joy of Jesus who abides in our soul. Let us keep in our hearts the joy of God's love, and let us share this joy of loving one another as He loves each one of us."

### **Schools of Joy**

May the book I offer you today help bring you deep joy. The book simply evokes the joy promised at Bethlehem to men and women of good will. I pray that each of you, every family, home, institution and parish be a "school of joy."

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