

A Vision
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When Joshua addressed the people with a question, "If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve!" This is a question every generation must answer, including ours. Each one of us must reply. What world do we really want to live in? Which world do we really welcome into our lives, and seek the pleasures there of?

Recently I invited my daughter and her two young children to visit us for a week. They were most anxious to come and she told me that I was the children's favorite grandpa because I played with them. We met them at the baggage claim. When they saw me they ran to me with open arms, hugging me around the waist and the legs, kissing me and welcoming me into their world. I in turn threw open my arms and hugged them, welcoming them into my world. It was a wonderful feeling, a JOY in my life.

We had a wonderful week together, which went all too quickly. Parting was a bit teary, but we agreed to do it again next year. They were happy and sad at the same time. So was I.

A few weeks later I had a most unusual experience. As I entered this church I became awestruck when I viewed the crucifix on the wall behind the altar; a sight I have seen so many, many times. But this time all I could see was the outstretched arms of Jesus. I couldn't see his head with the crown of thorns. I couldn't see his body with the wound in his side. I couldn't see his feet nor his hands with the nails. I could only see his outstretched arms welcoming me into his world. I had to sit and meditate on that vision. It was saying to me, "Welcome to my world!"

I began to ask, "What is your world that you are welcoming me into? Your world, Lord is full of pain, disappointment, rejection, abandonment, ridicule, hurts of all description. Is this what I really want for myself? What do I want for myself? I just want to be

happy! And what do I want tomorrow, more happy? And the next day? More happy? Desire for happiness is insatiable because it is all about ME and MY future and that becomes selfishness, the fear that it wont last; so I work hard at being happy. This becomes a futile endeavor. I began to wonder if Jesus ever promised me happiness in this world. NOT once in Scripture did Jesus ever promise happiness. But He did promised JOY 27 times. Happiness, joy: aren't they the same thing? NO. Happy is about the future which is uncertain. Joy is about my past. Joy is a satisfaction; something that I have done that is just and right something in my past that can never be taken from me...the good things I have done can never be undone, for no one can change history. These are the good things I bring with me to my judgment. Joy is generosity while happy is about selfishness. One cannot be happy and unhappy at the same time but one can be joyous even when they are happy or unhappy! Some happiness in our lives is a plus but not to be the focus of our desire.

Which God do we choose, the God of happy or the God of Joy? This is a hard choice that even the people of Jesus' time couldn't make. They didn't have enough faith. They murmured among themselves that to follow Jesus was too hard and they walked away. Happy is what the world chooses. People of faith choose Joy, for we all know that we must carry the crosses of life with forbearance, which of itself is a great act of love even for a little while, just as Jesus did for the love of us. His love for us was a suffering love that led to the glory of God; just as our lives must also be a suffering love leading to the glory of God, which is our JOY.

A true love is an act of self-denial. A true love wants to be loved in return as a free will act. True love wants to share. It wants to be with the beloved. It wants to please. It wants be proud of its relationship. It wants to exclude any undesirable faults. It wants exclusivity and pro-creation with its beloved. It wants to open its arms in welcome. This is the way Christ loves us. How do we love Him? By keeping our distance! By being late for our date with Him on Sunday. By running out on Him early to pander to other

pleasures. These are not signs of being a lover.... rather they are signs of a loser; a loss of the source of our Joy.

When you view the crucifix on the wall of our sanctuary, I hope that all you can see, is His open arms welcoming you into His world...His world of JOY becoming your world of Joy by the generosity of your love of neighbor. To know our God is to love Him, and to love him is to serve him as the Israelites chose to do when Joshua challenged them.

If we accept Jesus as the Son of God, then we must accept everything He tells us as reliable truth. The final gift that Jesus gave His Church was the commissioning and the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide His Church to the end of time. Even with all the trials of the Church today, the Holy Spirit is fully in charge of working to keep us from going astray. To doubt this is to doubt the Holy Spirit. The big battle the Spirit is confronted with is the misuse of our free will. Many times we choose a false god in our lives only to be disappointed because it is selfishness. True love is a suffering of self denial which ultimately provides joy through the Holy Spirit. Let us choose wisely also!