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# CATHOLIC STAND

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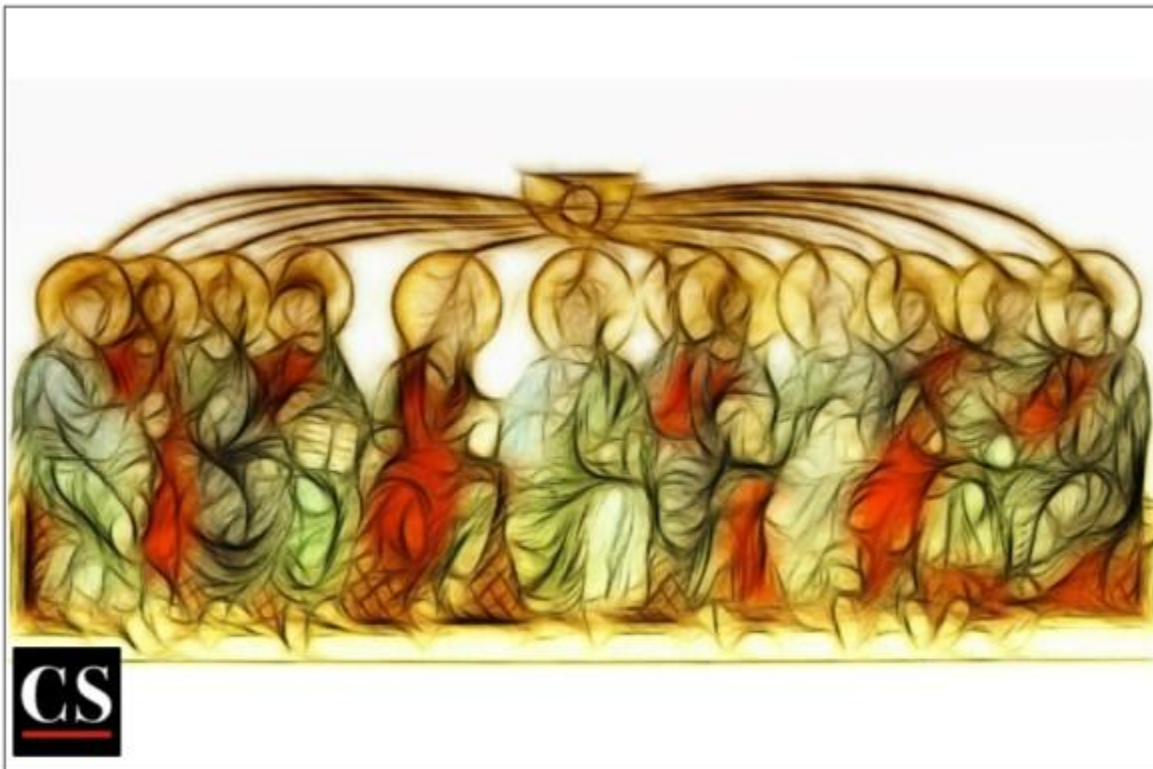
Living the Truth the Church Teaches

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Discovering Joy in Suffering

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I am living “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything” ([2 Corinthians 6:10](#)).

No matter what our circumstances are, when our eyes are fixed on our Lord, we can live in joy. This is the normal Christian life, not for a few select saints.

Jesus *expects* Christians to walk on water with Him, daily, no matter how much we would rather sink into hopelessness beneath the storms which threaten our secure little world.

I am in the middle of a family crisis. As I struggle to surrender to God, I find myself getting caught in the weeds once again. My swirling thoughts ensnare me and pull me down under the waves of this storm as I replay conversations over and over again in my mind. I start to sink. Somehow Christ manages to break through my panic and says, “Come, walk on the water with me”, just like He told Peter.

Just like Peter, I must look at Christ constantly because I can’t walk on water on my own. When I manage only a quick look at Christ, He lifts me up, swipes the weeds out of my mind with blinding light and touches my heart with joy. So I continue to thank and praise God in the midst of difficulties, trusting He knows what He is doing, even if I only see chaos with my mortal eyes.

### **God Uses our Suffering**

Years ago, I did not know how to remain joyful when I was stretched to the limits of my endurance. It was difficult living in poverty (by Canadian standards) with a husband struggling with depression and surrounded by the clamour of nine children. We lived on an isolated farm where we raised all our own meat and most of our vegetables. Lack of sleep was part of the reason that most of my coping strategies failed. I felt my emotional pain physically, as though a dagger had pierced my heart. Of course, I saw myself as a saintly victim, blaming my husband for all my woes and sinking into moments of dramatic self-pity.

Yet, I did not crave mere happiness. I knew there is a world of difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is dependent on circumstances but I knew that it is possible to dwell in joy, even in the direst of circumstances. To me, happiness is a fickle, surface emotion that is fleeting at best, impossible to even touch when I am surrounded by difficulties. Yet it was precisely a life filled with difficulties and yes, I could even say suffering, which stripped away my inner stumbling blocks to joy.

### **Cognitive Therapy**

It was a Catholic psychiatrist who taught me how to access the joy which is rooted deep within all of us, the joy which is ready to bubble up, instantaneously, if only we take a moment to connect with it. I learnt I can choose to live in my thoughts and my surface emotions which are dependent on what I am doing or seeing at that precise moment. However, if I take off what I call my dung-coloured glasses and look at reality, I can be grateful and be happy, no matter what my problems are when I look at the big picture and do not focus on my woes. This is [Cognitive Therapy](#).

At the snap of my fingers, I can look deeper, deeper than my thoughts, deeper than my wounded emotions, and touch my inner spirit, the core self who is united to the eternal God. Immediately joy, pure bliss bubbles up and I can laugh, even as tears dry on my face.

Why?

My spirit is made up of the very same stuff that God is made up of, so when I open my spirit to Him, His joy and life and strength immediately flows into me.

I do not have to be perfect. I do not earn this joy. All that is needed is the humility to realize I cannot survive on my own strength and then ask for His strength and His life-giving joy. Finding joy, living in joy even though I am suffering is as easy and as difficult as this.

### **Joy in Suffering**

Our entrenched world view often prevents human beings from experiencing an ever-deepening new life in, with, and through Christ. Most of us view life, especially periods of difficulty through what I call dung-coloured glasses rather seeing our suffering through eyes of faith.

Realists might chuckle at those who naively wear rose-coloured glasses but those of us who wear dung-coloured glasses are just as naive with our tendency to see darkly. When I am miserable, nothing, not riches, nor prestige, or a change in circumstances, nothing can change my interior unhappiness. St. Paul joyfully sang hymns of praise while chained in a dank prison because he knew Christians are living in the Mystical Body of Christ, intimately connected to the Love of God.

When I see through eyes of faith, nothing can separate me from the sustaining love of God.

*... I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ([Romans 8:38-39](#))*

### **Stale Water and Rotten Cabbages**

There is a scene at the end of C.S. Lewis series, [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), which is an example of how our deep-seated presumptions about the world affect how we see and experience life. Our world view can imprison us, preventing us from living in joy.

Lewis's fictitious characterization of the grumpy, miserable dwarfs taught me about my own dung-coloured glasses because their perception of reality was so obviously skewed, their behaviour hilariously outrageous.

The enemies of Aslan have imprisoned the children, a few animals, Prince Caspian, as well as disgruntled dwarfs in a shed that is dank and dark, filled with putrid straw, with stale water to drink and rotten cabbages to eat. A war against the evil forces rages outside. Outwardly, it seems that all is lost; yet the children, Prince, and animals hold on to the belief that Aslan, who is a Christ figure, will come and save Narnia. Of course, the dwarfs mock their ridiculous faith.

Suddenly Aslan appears, vanquishes the enemy and the back of the prison crumbles revealing a glorious sight. It is Narnia, but more resplendent, filled with a radiant light. Everything is more colourful, beautiful, fragrant. It is a resurrected Narnia. Heaven has come to earth. A table, covered with a white cloth and laden with delicacies, beckons them.

Everyone celebrates by feasting on the delicious food laid out before them as they delight in the beauty all around. The dwarfs hang back, suspicious and mistrustful. When they finally venture a nibble of a delicacy, they spit it out in disgust. All the dwarves taste is stale water and rotten cabbages. All they see is the dark, dank prison. The grumpy dwarfs refuse this new life that the other characters are enjoying right beside them. These dwarves need cognitive therapy.

Many of us are no better than dwarfs, wearing dung-coloured glasses, viewing God's creation darkly. The solution? Just take off your dung-coloured glasses and allow Christ, our Saviour, to change how we experience reality.

**We can be joyful in difficult circumstances when we live in Christ and He lives in us and when we see reality, not our circumstances.**