

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 16th 2024

JOY

John the Baptist had an ascetic life and perhaps followed the austere lifestyle of the Qumran community which had its life in the desert, away from the contaminations of the outside world. They spent their time in study of the scriptures, preparing for the coming of the Messiah through rigorously discipline body and spirit by fasting and penance. Evidently, his followers followed the lifestyle of the master. The Gospels have also recorded that some of the disciples of John the Baptist later on became the disciples of Jesus. Hence, the disciples of the Baptist and Jesus must have been friends and knew what was happening each camp.

Now the Baptist camp perhaps must have been a little envious of the more relaxed lifestyle of Jesus' disciples. Maybe there was even a bit of self-righteousness in this question, implying that it was high time for Jesus to make His followers shape up and follow the common practices of such religious groups.

We should not forget that the Gospel of Matthew which was written over 40 years after the death of Jesus, was trying to address certain issues that Community of Matthew was facing. The Judaisers in the early Church were perhaps making life complicated for the young community of believers by introducing all the rules and regulations and traditions of the Jewish religion. Matthew wants to make it clear for his community, that fasting or any other traditional religious practices have their value but not at the expense of faith in Jesus and in his teachings. He teaches us to be people of joy and – joy of being friends of the bridegroom – the friends of Jesus.

We all sometimes make our lives harder than they need to be, by taking on more than Jesus expects of us. We complicate what could be straightforward. Jesus taught us to love and God and Love God's people. Every other regulation that goes against love and charity, is not from God. The prophet Micah put it this way: "Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously."

May be we should avoid getting tied up in knots trying to figure out minor details of life. Otherwise, we could end up missing out on the fullness of joy and peace that comes from God. This is the Year of St. Joseph. Remember the statue of sleeping St. Joseph? Pope Francis had said he loves this statue. When confronted with complicated issues, he would write a note and place it under the statue of St. Joseph and go to bed for a peaceful sleep! Let us be joyous people of the resurrection!

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