



Joy

Joy is more than happiness, just as happiness is more than pleasure. Pleasure is in the body. Happiness is in the mind and feelings. Joy is deep in the heart, the spirit, the center of the self.

The way to pleasure is power and prudence. The way to happiness is moral goodness. The way to joy is sanctity, loving God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself.

Everyone wants pleasure. More deeply, everyone wants happiness. Most deeply, everyone wants joy.

Freud says that spiritual joy is a substitute for physical pleasure. People become saints out of sexual frustrations.

This is exactly the opposite of the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas says, "No man can live without joy. That is why one deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures." Sanctity is never a substitute for sex, but sex is often a substitute for sanctity.

The simplest, most unanswerable proof that Aquinas is right and Freud is wrong, is experience. It is not a matter of faith alone. It has been proved by experience by many, many people, many, many times. You can repeat the experiment and prove it to yourself. You can be absolutely certain that it is true, just as you can be certain that fire is hot and ice is cold.

Millions of people for thousands of years have tried the experiment, and not one of them has ever been cheated. All who seek, find—this is not just a promise about the next life, to be believed by faith, but a promise about this life, to be proved by experience, to be tested by experiment.

No one who ever said to God, "Thy will be done" and meant it with his heart, ever failed to find joy—not just in heaven, or even down the road in the future in this world, but in this world at that very moment, here and now.

In the very act of self-surrender to God there is joy. Not just later, as a consequence, but right then. It is exactly like a woman's voluntary sexual surrender to a man. The mystics often say all souls are female to God; that's one reason why God is always symbolized as male. Of course it's only a symbol, but it's a true symbol, a symbol of something true.

The symbolism is not "sexist" either. It holds for a man's soul as well. Only when lovers give up all control and melt helplessly into each other's bodies and spirits, only when they overcome the fear that demands control, do they find the deepest joy. Frigidity, whether sexual or spiritual, comes from egotism.

We've all known people who are cold, suspicious, mistrusting, unable to let go. These people are miserable, wretched. They can't find joy because they can't trust, they can't have faith. You need faith to love, and you need to love to find joy. Faith, love, and joy are a package deal.

Every time I have ever said yes to God with something even slightly approaching the whole of my soul, every time I have not only *said* "Thy will be done" but meant it, loved it, longed for it—I have never failed to find joy and peace *at that moment*. In fact, to the precise extent that I have said it and meant it, to exactly that extent have I found joy.

Every other Christian who has ever lived has found exactly the same thing in his own experience. It is an experiment that has been performed over and over again billions of times, always with the same result. It is as certain as gravity.

It sounds too good to be true. It sounds like pious exaggeration, a salesman's pitch. Instant joy? All you have to do is surrender to God? What's the catch?

There *is* a catch. It's a big one, but a simple one: you have to really do it, not just think about it.

To do it completely requires something we dislike very much: death. Not the death of the body. The body is not the obstacle. The ego is. Self-will is. We fear giving *that* up even more than we fear giving up our body to death—even though that ego, the thing St. Paul calls "the old man" in us, or the Adam in us, is the cause of all our misery.

That old self has sold itself to the devil. It's his microphone. It sits there behind our ears chattering away. When we're about to give ourselves to God, it instantly whispers to us: "Careful, now. Hold back. Don't get too close to him. He's dangerous. In fact, he's a killer."

The voice speaks some truth. Even the devil has to begin with some truth in order to twist it into a lie. It's true; God is a killer. If you let him, he will kill your old, selfish, unhappy, bored, wretched, mistrusting, loveless self.

But he will do it only if you want him to; and he will do it only as much as you want him to. God is a gentleman. He will never rape your soul, only woo it.

And when he does, you understand one of the reasons why sex is so different, so special, so holy: it is an image of *this*, of heaven, of the ultimate meaning and destiny and purpose of your life.

Even the tiny foretaste of heaven that we can all have here on earth by surrendering to God is as much more joyful than the greatest ecstasy sex can give, just as being with your beloved is more joyful than being with her picture.

You either believe all this, or you don't. If you do, then do it! If you don't, then try it. You'll like it.