

THE ORDER OF PENANCE AND OF JOY

By Fr. Faustine, O.F.M.

"The Kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. XIV, 17.)

Constant cheerfulness and happiness were among the chief characteristics of our holy Father, St. Francis. "His joy was a natural gift. Even before his conversion, when during the war against Perugia, he languished for a whole year in prison, he astonished his companions with his imperturbable cheerfulness and incessant singing. Throughout his life of poverty and hardships, he was always rich in joy." (Keppler, *More Joy*.) But is this not a contradiction? Can a man practice penance even to the austerity of St. Francis, and still be happy? Many persons are absolutely opposed to all religion and piety, because they regard them as incompatible with joy. And now it is claimed that one can practice penance and still be happy. Surely, this statement must be false, since, according to the popular mind, penance and joy are diametrically opposed to each other and necessarily exclude each other. Is this idea a correct one? It is, and it is not. It is correct and logical only then, when by joy we understand the false, perverted joy of this world and its votaries. True, this joy is inimical to religion and piety, to penance and virtue, and, to come nearer home, also to the Order of Penance, the Third Order of St. Francis. Pure, holy joy, however, is a necessary asset, an indispensable element of penance and religion, and, therefore, also of the Third Order.

1. False Joy

"Joy," says Bishop Keppler, "is a constituent of life, a necessity of life; it is an element of life's value and life's power. It is indispensa-

ble to the health of both soul and body; it is necessary to physical and spiritual industry." But the best sort of joy, true joy is seldom experienced by the great mass of men. It lies hidden in quiet places, and the world rushes madly by and fails to recognize it, and continues to mistake for it prosperity and riches, noise and laughter, fame and even cheap notoriety. King Solomon of all mortals surely had at his disposal everything that the world considers necessary and conducive to happiness. Yet, was he happy? "I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights and enjoy good things. I heaped together for myself silver and gold and the wealth of kings and provinces. I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem and whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure. And when I turned myself to all the works which my hand had wrought, I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind." (Eccl. II) These are his own words.

Riches, honors, pleasures, and amusements could not, therefore, make him happy. At times he experienced a certain sensual satisfaction, but lasting joy he found not. "I saw in all things vanity and that nothing was lasting under the sun." (Eccl. ib.) Consider the rich and honored and powerful of this world; think of those whose only care is amusement and pleasure; and then ask yourself the question: Are these people really happy? Are they enjoying true peace of heart? Your answer will be, provided you are upright with yourself: No, they are not happy. It is with them as with the feverish sick, who experience a momentary satis-

faction on slaking their burning thirst, only to be tortured the more after the cooling beverage has been taken. The joy of the world is, therefore, but an imaginary, fleeting joy, a joy that, when tasted, begets bitterness, grief, and sorrow.

"And joy may walk beside us
down the windings of our ways,
When lo! There sounds a footstep,
and we meet the face of grief."

Rev. A. Ryan.

We often hear the complaint, that our present age is a joyless one, and many there are who speak of a steady decline of joy. "But how is this alleged decline of joy to be reconciled with the actual multiplication of forms, kinds, occasions, contrivances, and establishments of entertainment and amusement, and with the steady increase in the use of all these? How does it fit with Sunday excursions, concert-halls, cheap shows and cabarets?" (*More Joy*). Everywhere we meet, with people hurrying and scurrying to one or the other of these many places of amusement. And yet we hear the statement repeated: Ours is a joyless age. Sad to say, this indictment is only too true. For, kind reader, all is not gold that glitters, and everything is not joy that appears to be joy.

If we examine a little more closely the joy and gayety of worldly amusements, what will we find? It is a joy that lasts but a short time, only as long as song and revelry can drown pain and sorrow. It is a joy that serves but to divert the mind for a few brief moments from the gnawing worm of conscience. It is a joy that makes its votaries forget the trials and troubles of this life, only to plunge them again the deeper into the abyss of their misery. It is an apple of Sodom, beautiful and tempting to behold, but filled with ashes and decay. A bright, glaring light alluring the unwary traveler, that proves to be

naught else than a deceitful will-o-the-wisp that leads those who follow it to destruction and ruin. It is a flash of lightning that illumines the darkness of the night with its transitory brightness, only to quickly disappear again and leave denser darkness behind. Outwardly the poor victims of these false pleasures appear gay and happy, while sorrow, dissatisfaction and anguish are gnawing at the very vitals of their soul. After a Sunday or holiday passed in these worldly pleasures, says Bishop Keppler, "the poor workman returns to the frightful monotony of his workaday existence with a heavy head, a heavier conscience, and a further deficit of strength and joy."

Well may he say "a heavier conscience and a further deficit of strength and joy," for many of these so-called pleasures are actually sinful, and, therefore, injurious to body and soul. Whatever is against good morals, whatever is improper, whatever can not be offered to God, is no real joy, but a mere sensual, carnal gratification. Hence, we can never speak of the impure, the gluttons, the spendthrifts as being joyful and happy. Theirs is only a sinful satisfaction which leaves a sickened body, an empty purse, shame and dishonor in its wake. "Unhappiness is counted by measures and happiness by drops" says the proverb, and with all truth; for small and meager is the happiness derived from these sinful pleasures, whereas the misery resulting from them is immeasurably great. "Woe to you that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" says the Prophet Isaias. (Is. V, 20.) And the Holy Spirit Himself declares: "All things have their season. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh." The breaking of this rule can not be conducive to

happiness, but begets much misery and woe.

We may conclude this little treatise on false joy, by merely hinting at the so-called diabolical joy, the joy of the envious and of the scoffers at virtue and religion, the joy of the seducer over his unhappy victim, the joy of hell over the loss of an immortal soul. It is self-evident that this joy is absolutely opposed to real happiness, and excludes true joy of its very nature.

Of all such joy—apparent, sinful and diabolical—we must say, that it is entirely at variance with penance, that it can find no place in the Order of Penance. The Tertiaries are, therefore, most earnestly admonished to keep aloof from it and its many sources. Study your holy Rule, dear Tertiaries, and

you will be convinced that this false joy can not agree with your Order of Penance. For why does the Rule warn you against too costly dress, intemperance in eating and drinking? Why does it admonish you to keep away from dances, dangerous plays, and all revelry? For no other reason than to preserve your heart from false joy, to prepare your souls for real, pure joy, the joy of the elect; a joy of which an eminent mystic of the Middle Ages says, "If you took all the pleasures of the world and made them into one, and then showered the whole on one man, it would be nothing compared to the joy of which I speak; for, in this case, God with all His purity, flows into the depths of us, and the soul not only is filled, but overflows with happiness."

(To be continued)

THE SORROWFUL WAY

HE falls! My Savior,
As he bears alone
The heavy Cross, whose wounding weight,
Does for my sin atone!

He falls! My Savior,
Let the stones proclaim
The cruel heart of man—
Earth's deepest shame!

He falls! My Savior,
May my soul receive
The grace of tears,
For all my sin to grieve!

Dr. W. Thornton Parker, Tertiary.