

Fr. Roger J. Landry
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Cheerfulness

“The spirit of the Society is one of loving trust, total surrender and cheerfulness as lived by Jesus and Mary in the Gospel.”

- Introduction
 - As we continue to ponder the “loving trust, total surrender and cheerfulness as lived by Jesus and Mary in the Gospel,” which is the Spirit of your Society, in the context of the Year of Faith, we come to the real fruit of trust that is loving and a surrender that is total: it’s joy. It’s cheerfulness.
 - Blessed Mother Teresa said quite emphatically, ““An MC must be an MC of Joy. By this sign the world will know you are MCs.” She stressed elsewhere, “In our Society, a cheerful disposition is one of the main virtues required to be a Missionary of Charity.”
 - This is key to the renewal and augmentation of faith that God wants to give us in this Year of Faith.
 - In his letter *Porta Fidei* to begin the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict said that we need to “rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the *joy* and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.”
 - In the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the four-hands commented that the Year of Faith is a “time of grace which is helping us to sense the great *joy* of believing and to renew our wonder at the vast horizons which faith opens up.”
 - The encyclical focuses on the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of faith for all of us and, quoting St. Justin Martyr, says that at the annunciation she conceived “faith and joy” and begged her in a prayer concluding the encyclical, “Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One.” The encyclical stresses “In the Mother of Jesus, faith demonstrated its fruitfulness; when our own spiritual lives bear fruit we become filled with joy, which is the clearest sign of faith’s grandeur.”
 - The clearest sign of the greatness of faith is joy. It’s the clearest sign of the loving trust and total surrender that is involved in faith. That’s what we want to ponder today in the last conference of this retreat.
- The importance of joy
 - I’d like to begin with the importance of joy or cheerfulness in our life as disciples and as missionaries of God’s love.
 - As disciples
 - We know that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). The word in Greek is *chara*, which is the same word as grace. Ours is a joy that is far different than the contentment of a well-fed dog. Ours is a joy that comes from knowing that God blesses us, that he loves us, that he grace us. When a Christian is not full of joy, it’s often a sign that they are either not aware of how blessed they are by God, or that they are not giving permission to the Holy Spirit, or that, because of sin, God has been evicted.
 - Leon Bloy used to say that joy is most infallible sign of God’s presence.
 - As missionaries
 - A son of God, a friend of God, a spouse of Christ, who is not joyful is a scandal. If we don’t live with joy, we make the good news a lie.
 - St. Josemaria Escriva used to talk about this connection between joy and bringing Christ to others:
 - “Long face, rough manner, ridiculous appearance, unfriendly attitude. Is that how you hope to inspire others to follow Christ?”

- “The first step towards bringing others to the ways of Christ is for them to see you happy and serene, sure in your advance towards God.”
 - Pope Paul VI pondered this quite a bit:
 - Lineamenta: 25. “In fact, the obstacles to the new evangelization are precisely a lack of joy and hope among people, caused and spread by various situations in our world today. Oftentimes, this lack of joy and hope is so strong that it affects the very tenor of our Christian communities. This is the reason for renewing the appeal for a new evangelization, not simply as an added responsibility but as a way to restore joy and life to situations imprisoned in fear. We therefore approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. *Ps* 126:6). “May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history - an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.” (Paul VI).
 - Lumen Fidei said, “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.” The spreading of the faith is meant to increase joy in the giver and in the recipient.
 - Cardinal Dolan once said that if we were truly joyful, the world would be invading our Churches.
 - One of the most important acts of charity you will ever give to others is your joy, the joy that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the communion with Jesus, who came to give us his joy so that our joy might become complete (Jn 15:11).
- Mary’s joy
 - As alluded to above, we see this type of joy in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mother Teresa said that “joy was the strength of Our Lady.”
 - We see in her annunciation a two-fold source of joy. She was told by the Archangel to rejoice because:
 - She was full of grace (full of God)
 - The Lord was with her.
 - Later at the Visitation she would describe her joy in a way we should ponder:
 - My spirit rejoices in God my savior... because
 - He has looked on her humility
 - Done great things for her
 - Mercy
 - Exalted the humble
 - Filled the hungry
 - Helped Israel in fidelity to his covenant of mercy.
 - We have the same reasons for joy!
 - St. Josemaria encouraged us to ponder the joy in Jesus’ and Mary’s lives
 - What must the cheerful way that Jesus looked upon people have been like? It must have been the same which shone from the eyes of his Mother who could not contain her joy — Magnificat anima mea Dominum! — and her soul glorified the Lord while she carried Him within her and by her side. Oh, Mother!: May we, like you, rejoice to be with Him and to hold Him.
- Characteristics of joy

- While I was a seminarian at the North American College, now Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, our rector, a man filled with true Christian joy, gave us a tremendous conference on joy. I'd like to mention some of the structure of what he said, because it's always inspired me. I'll add to his outline with some thoughts from Blessed Mother Teresa and other sources.
- He said that there were several source of our joy:
 - First, the conviction that God loves us as a Father
 - St. Ignatius of Loyola: first step in growth in holiness is recognition of God's love for me, totally unmerited
 - We must believe in God's deep love for us, accept it, express gratitude for it, and to give it back to the Lord
 - (FXNVT) An orphan who has everything could still be happy, but he will not know the same happiness enjoyed by a child with parents. However poor, a child who experiences love will be a happy child. Then realize that you are the happiest of children because you are a child of God the Father and a child of Mary.
 - (SJME) The cheerfulness you should have is not the kind we might call physiological good spirits — the happiness of a healthy animal. You must seek something more: the supernatural happiness that comes from the abandonment of everything and the abandonment of yourself into the loving arms of our Father-God.
 - (SJME) A piece of advice on which I have insisted repeatedly: be cheerful, always cheerful. It is for those to be sad who do not consider themselves to be sons of God.
 - (SJME) "Happy?" — The question made me think. Words have not yet been invented to express all that one feels — in the heart and in the will — when one knows oneself to be a son of God.
 - (SJME) If we feel we are beloved sons of our Heavenly Father, as indeed we are, how can we fail to be happy all the time? Think about it.
 - (SJME) Cheerfulness is a necessary consequence of our divine filiation, of knowing that our Father God loves us with a love of predilection, that he holds us up and helps us and forgives us. Remember this and never forget it: even if it should seem at times that everything around you is collapsing, in fact nothing is collapsing at all, because God doesn't lose battles.
 - Second, God's indwelling in us through the gift of sanctifying grace.
 - This flows from the conviction of God's love.
 - We encounter this joy in the Sacraments
 - God doesn't just love us, but lives with us in love. He'll never leave. As long as we don't kick him out. But then we have confession. The deep joy of a good confession.
 - We nourish this life given to us in baptism through prayer, practice of virtue and sacraments.
 - We have a chance to receive God each day!
 - (FXNVT) Holiness does not consist in putting on long faces or being sad and miserable. Holiness is continuously joyful because it is the possession of God.
 - (SJME) You are unhappy? — Think: there must be an obstacle between God and me. You will seldom be wrong.
 - (SJME) *Servite Domino in laetitia!* — I will serve God cheerfully. With a cheerfulness that is a consequence of my Faith, of my Hope and of my Love — and that will last for ever. For, as the Apostle assures us, *Dominus prope est!* — the Lord follows me closely. I shall walk with Him, therefore,

quite confidently, for the Lord is my Father, and with his help I shall fulfil his most lovable Will, even if I find it hard.

- Third, a trust and hope in divine providence
 - God is in charge, loves us and is within us. He's conquered sin, Satan, death.
 - How can anything extinguish our joy? Neither death, nor life...
 - Even those who from a human point of view are desperate can be profoundly joyful if they trust in God and in his love
- Prayer
 - This is how we put our trust in God's providence into action. Ask and you shall receive, sometimes even more than we ask for. "Present your needs to God in every form of prayer and in petitions full of gratitude." Phil 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
 - We pray for the gift of the fruit of joy to the HS. We ask for it!
 - The ability to approach God is itself a source of joy. He is our father!
- Communion of Saints
 - (SJME) Another man of faith wrote to me: "When you have to be on your own, you can notice clearly the help of your brothers. Now, when it comes to my mind that I have to put up with everything 'all alone', I often think that, if it weren't for that 'company we keep from afar' — the holy Communion of Saints — I would not be able to preserve this optimism which fills my heart."
 - (SJME) Don't forget that sometimes one needs to have smiling faces around.
- Your constitutions approach these same truths in another way:
 - (MT) Joy is not simply a matter of temperament. In the service of God and souls it is always hard. All the more reason why we should try to acquire it and make it grow in our hearts. Joy is prayer, joy is strength, joy is love, joy is a net of love by which we catch souls.
 - Joy is prayer
 - Joy is the sign of our generosity, selflessness and close and continual union with God
 - (MT) "By this joy, I do not mean boisterous laughter and screaming; no, that is deceitful, it can be there to hide something. By this joy I mean that inner depth of joy in you, in your eyes, look, facial movements, actions, swiftness, etc. "That my joy may be in you," says Jesus. What is the joy of Jesus? It is the result of His continual union with God, doing the Will of the Father. "I have come that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." This is the fruit of union with God, of being in the presence of God. Living in the presence of God fills us with joy. God is Joy. To bring joy to us, Jesus became man."
 - Joy is love
 - A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love.
 - The one who gives with joy gives most.
 - God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7).
 - (MT) God loves a cheerful giver. He gives most who gives with joy. If in the work you have difficulties and you accept them with joy, with a big smile — in this, like in any other thing — they will see your good works and glorify the Father. The best way to show your gratitude to God and people is to accept everything with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love.
 - (SJME) Would you like to know a secret to happiness? Give yourself to others and serve them, without waiting to be thanked.

- (SJME) That friend of mine came up to me: “They tell me you are in love.” I was very surprised and the only thing I could think to ask was where he got that news. He said that he could read it in my eyes, which shone with joy.
- (MT) We have every reason to be the happiest people in the world. To be the happiest we have to belong to Jesus fully without any reservations as He alone is worthy of our love and total surrender.
- Love involves self-sacrifice and suffering:
 - (MT) Cheerfulness should be one of the main points of our religious life. A cheerful giver is a great giver. A cheerful giver-religious is like sunshine in the community. Cheerfulness is a sign of a generous and mortified person who, forgetting all things, even himself, tries to please his God in all he does for souls. Cheerfulness is often a cloak which hides a life of sacrifice, continual union with God, fervor, and generosity. A person who has this gift of cheerfulness very often reaches a great height of perfection. For God loves a cheerful giver and He takes close to His heart the religious he loves.
 - (MT) Remember that the Passion of Christ ends always in the joy of the Resurrection of Christ. So when you feel in your own heart the sufferings of Christ, remember the Resurrection has to come, the joy of Easter has to dawn. Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of Christ Risen.
 - (MT) When suffering comes into our lives, we should accept it with a smile. This is the greatest gift from God: to have the courage to accept everything he gives us and asks of us with a smile.
 - (SJME) You asked me if I had a cross to bear. And I answered, “Yes, we always have to bear the Cross.” But it is a glorious Cross, a divine seal, the authentic guarantee of our being children of God. That is why, with the Cross, we always travel happily on our way.
 - (SJME) You feel happier. But this time it is a fidgety sort of happiness, a bit impatient. With it comes the clear feeling that something is being wrested from you as a sacrifice. Listen to me carefully: here on earth there is no perfect happiness. That is why, now, immediately, without complaining or feeling a victim, you should offer yourself as an oblation to God, with total and absolute self-surrender.
 - (SJME) Happiness is a consequence of self-surrender. It is re-affirmed every time you turn the water-wheel.
 - (FXNVT) You have no money? You have no gift to give? You have nothing at all? You are forgetting that you have the gift of happiness to give to others, the gift of peace which this world cannot give, the treasure of joy which knows no bounds.
- Joy is evangelization
 - Joy is a net of love by which we can catch souls.
 - (SJME) Now that you have given yourself to God your happiness cannot be taken away. But you must feel a great concern and desire for everyone to share in your joy!
 - (SJME) Every Christian has the duty to bring peace and joy to his own surroundings on earth. This cheerful crusade of manliness will move even shrivelled or rotten hearts, and raise them to God.
 - A sister filled with joy preaches without preaching.
 - (MT) Joy is one of the most essential things in our Society. An MC must be an MC of joy. She must radiate that joy to everyone. By this sign the world will know you are MCs. Everyone in the world sees you and remarks and

speaks out about the MCs not because of what they do but because they are happy to do the work they do and live the life they live.

- (MT) I will never understand all the good that a simple smile can accomplish.
- The martyr's joy was a great evangelizer:
 - (MT) During the persecution, people used to watch those who had this joy radiating on their faces. By that joy they knew who the Christians were and thus they persecuted the Christians. St. Paul, whom we are trying to imitate in our zeal, was an apostle of joy. He always urged the early Christians to rejoice in the Lord always. His whole life can be summed up in one sentence: "I belong to Christ. Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ, neither sufferings nor persecutions, nor anything. I live now no longer I, but it is Christ who lives in me." That is why he was so full of joy."
 - (SJME) May no one read sadness or sorrow in your face, when you spread in the world around you the sweet smell of your sacrifice: the children of God should always be sowers of peace and joy.
 - (SJME) The cheerfulness of a man of God, of a woman of God, has to overflow: it has to be calm, contagious, attractive ... ; in a few words, it has to be so supernatural, and natural, so infectious that it may bring others to follow Christian ways.
- Joy is a physical generator
 - Joy makes us always ready to go about doing good.
 - The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10)
 - (MT) Cheerfulness and joy were Our Lady's strength. This made her a willing handmaid of God, her Son. For as soon as He came to her she went in haste. Only joy could have given her the strength to go in haste over the hills of Judea — to do the work of a handmaid to her cousin.
 - (MT) Joy is a need and power for us, even physically. One who has cultivated a spirit of joy feels less tired and is always ready to go on doing good
- Practical consequences of being cheerful with regard to the vows. There's a commitment to:
 - To live the life of poverty in cheerful trust.
 - To imitate the chastity, the cause of our joy;
 - To offer cheerful obedience from inward joy;
 - To minister to Christ in His distressing disguise with cheerful devotion.
 - A joyful sister is like the sunshine of God's love, the hope of eternal happiness, the flame of burning love.
 - (MT) It is very strange that the four vows demand so much cheerfulness. In our case, this cheerfulness is very necessary, for without it we shall seldom have the courage to grasp the real meaning of Total Surrender. Since we do it, why not do it with a happy heart.
- This ministry of joy starts at home:
 - (MT) I want you to make a resolution to be cheerful. What is a cheerful MC? The sunshine of God's love, the hope of eternal life. Are you the sunshine in your community? One day something is wrong with you and everything goes upside down. Some of you make a resolution to be miserable. Don't allow your community to become miserable — without joy. Make one resolution, to be the cause of joy in your community. The community must look up and see Jesus in you.

- (MT) Sometimes it is harder for us to smile at those who live with us, the immediate members of our families, that it is to smile at those who are not so close to us. Let us never forget: love begins at home.
- The opposite of joy: sadness and moodiness
 - Blessed Mother Teresa has quite a lot to say about sadness and moodiness.
 - Sadness is an obstacle to holiness and an opening to the evil one:
 - (MT) Joy is one of the best safeguards against temptations. The devil is a carrier of dust and dirt — he uses every chance to throw what he has at us. A joyful heart knows how to protect himself from such dirt — Jesus can take full possession of our soul only if it surrenders itself joyfully. “A saint who is sad is a sad saint,” St. Francis de Sales used to say. St. Teresa was worried about her sisters only when she saw any of them lose their joy.
 - (MT) Moodiness — be really frightened of it, as if you are frightened of the devil. This is deliberately giving in to sin.
 - (SJME) True virtue is not sad or disagreeable, but pleasantly cheerful.
 - Sadness is a scandal
 - (MT) Sadness is like gangrene that eats up the very bone. Sad religious are the greatest stumbling block to vocations because young people, like God, love a cheerful giver.
 - Sadness harms the poor
 - (MT) Joy is a characteristic sign of a Christian and particularly of an MC. An MC who has not this joy is not worthy of his name. Our poor people suffer much, and unless we go with joy we cannot help them. We will make them more miserable. If you are moody then you are sick, maybe physically, but then you should not go out because you do not give Christ.
 - Sadness leads to lukewarmness
 - (MT) This moodiness, heaviness, sadness, is a very easy way to tepidity — the mother of all evil. If you want to break poverty, chastity, obedience, be tepid. If you are cheerful, have no fear of tepidity. Joy shines in the eyes, comes out in the speech and walk. You can’t keep it in for it bubbles out. When people see the habitual happiness in your eyes, it will make them realize they are the beloved children of God.
 - Thoughts of other saints
 - We should not give into sadness even when things go badly
 - (SJME) If things go well, let us rejoice, blessing God who makes them prosper. And if they go badly? Let us rejoice, blessing God who allows us to share in the sweetness of his Cross.
 - (FXNVT) How is it that you feel discouraged if you are working for God? The more difficult things are, the happier you should be, just as John and Peter were when they were flogged at the hands of the Sanhedrin. “So the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to be dishonored for the sake of the Name” (Acts 5:41); or like Paul, “I am wonderfully encouraged and despite all our afflictions, I am brimming over with joy” (2 Cor 7:4).
 - (FXNVT) Be happy with those who love you, with those who hate you, when your heart suffers deeply, when everyone follows you, when you are alone and abandoned. Be joyful and help everyone you meet to experience this same joy, even when you may feel brokenhearted. To act in this way requires more virtue than all the acts of fasting and self-denial put together.
 - When we’re sad, we should seek to pray ourselves out of it
 - (FXNVT) How can you rid yourself of sadness? Pray! And why pray? Because in prayer you meet the Lord, just as Mary Magdalene met him while she searched for

his body, or as the two disciples met him on the road to Emmaus, where they soon forgot their grief and distress (cf. Jn 20:18; Lk 24:33-35).

- (SJME) You ask me to suggest a cure for your sadness. I'll give you a prescription from an expert adviser, the Apostle Saint James: *Tristatur aliquis vestrum*, are you sad, my son? *Ore!* Pray! Try it and you will see.
- Things that can sap and threaten our joy
 - Here I return fundamentally to the thoughts of now Cardinal Dolan from a rector's conference on joy during my time as a seminarian. He mentioned four things that can endanger our cheerfulness:
 - Self-pity
 - We start feeling bad for ourselves. Builds on itself.
 - Think of ourselves as martyrs. See everything as half-full glasses, rather than as blessings from God.
 - We should be third, yet self-pity puts us first.
 - (SJME) It is all too easy to say: "I'm useless; nothing turns out right for me — for us." Apart from not being true, that pessimism masks a great deal of laziness. There are things you do well, and things you do badly. Fill yourself with joy and with hope on account of the former; and face up to the latter — without losing heart — in order to put things right; and they will work out
 - (SJME) You don't feel like doing anything and there is nothing you look forward to. It is like a dark cloud. Showers of sadness fell, and you experienced a strong sensation of being hemmed in. And, to crown it all, a despondency set in, which grew out of a more or less objective fact: you have been struggling for so many years ... and you are still so far behind, so far. All this is necessary, and God has things in hand. In order to attain *gaudium cum pace* — true peace and joy, we have to add to the conviction of our divine filiation, which fills us with optimism, the acknowledgment of our own personal weakness.
 - (SJME) If you cut any hint of envy out at the roots, and if you sincerely rejoice in other people's success, you will not lose your cheerfulness.
 - Worry
 - We often plenty to worry about.
 - Jesus tells us not to worry. God loves us, yet we do
 - The vow of poverty should help us with these worries, but there are other types of worries as well.
 - Worry is a sin against faith, because God told us not to worry.
 - Worry is a sin against hope in God's providence.
 - We don't have the weight of the world on our shoulders!
 - Pope Blessed John XXIII's wisdom each night before the tabernacle teaches us how to place all our concerns on the Lord: "Signore, è la vostra chiesa. Vado dormire!"
 - Placing our happiness in anything other than God
 - Joy does not depend on acclaim, advancement, promotion, recognition, fame, prestige, power, money, anything, but just on God and on love.
 - Otherwise we're building our lives on sand.
 - If we're told we can't do something we want to do, if we lose our joy, then our hearts were not in God and in his will.
 - Joy is not the same thing as pleasure. Pleasure may be in our power; joy is not. Anyone who has tasted joy would never exchange it for all the pleasure in the world (CS Lewis).

- (SJME) Nobody is happy on earth until he decides not to be. This is the way the path goes: suffering — in Christian terms — the Cross; God's Will, Love; happiness here and, afterwards, eternally.
- (SJME) There are men who have no faith, who are sad and hesitant because of the emptiness of their existence, and exposed like weathercocks to “changeable” circumstances. How different that is from our trusting life as Christians, which is cheerful, firm and solid, because we know and are absolutely convinced of our supernatural destiny!
- Complaining
 - This can be common among priests and religious.
 - Some of us would have complained about the menu at the Last Supper.
 - Some of us are playing on the field; others are criticizing from the stands. If we're in the first group, we should be prepared for criticism from those in group two. That shouldn't rob us of our joy, if our joy also involves following Jesus in carrying the Cross.
 - (SJME) With crystal clarity I see the formula, the secret of happiness, both earthly and eternal. It is not just a matter of accepting the Will of God but of embracing it, of identifying oneself with it — in a word, of loving the Divine Will with a positive act of our own will. This, I repeat, is the infallible secret of joy and peace.
 - (SJME) I am every day more convinced that happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth.
- Conclusion
 - This Year of Faith is meant to be a year of joy, flowing from the encounter with Jesus Christ who seeks to give us his own joy. As we pray, “Lord increase our faith,” we're praying for an increase in what Pope Benedict called the clearest sign of faith's grandeur, joy.
 - We turn to the one who is called the “cause of our joy” and make her hymn of joyful praise to God our own: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”