

Living well through Advent

Week Three

Monday 12 December 2022

Simplicity and Joy

“Joy is not just about being happy. Joy is a rigorous spiritual practice of saying yes to life on life’s terms.”

Mark Matousek

Have you ever thought about the difference between happiness and joy? The Dalai Lama and the late Desmond Tutu provide a helpful distinction in a book they wrote together a few years ago entitled, “The Book of Joy.” They observe that happiness tends to be based on circumstances and is fleeting, like a butterfly that comes and goes. This focus on circumstances is revealed when we hear ourselves say something like, “I will be happy when such and such happens.” This indicates that our happiness depends on something outside of ourselves.

Joy is internal and more constant. Joy is less dependent on external circumstances. Desmond Tutu faced enormous suffering in his lifetime (as has the Dalai Lama), yet Tutu was one of the most joyful people one could ever hope to meet. We are all familiar with his infectious smile and laugh. His joy came from a place deep within, from a lifetime of cultivation.

Cultivating a spirit of joy takes regular practice, much like cultivating simplicity. This week, we will focus on the more profound experiences of simplicity and joy that are less affected by the inevitable ebbs and flows of external events. This is similar to the “peace that passes understanding” and “an attitude of gratitude” referenced in earlier reflections. These interior mindsets of simplicity, joy, peace, and gratitude are the foundations of living a spiritual life which require a lifelong commitment to nurturing and strengthening.

Let us reflect on the following questions:

- ◆ Do you think of happiness and joy as being different?
- ◆ If so how, or why not?
- ◆ What initial thoughts do you have about the connection between simplicity and joy?
- ◆ Do you see a connection between these two in your life right now?

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