

Cheerfulness: The Safeguard of Spiritual Health.

By the Rev. Grieg Taber.

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SOME years ago a book was published bearing the engaging title *With a Merry Heart*,—a title which should be truly descriptive of the life history of every individual Christian. The saints were all cheerful because holiness is synonymous with cheerfulness. One of the most cheerful of all of God's saints, blessed Francis de Sales, once wrote "The greatest evil next to sin is sadness." Do you believe this? You had better believe it or you will find yourself declining the invitation to holiness. We might even go so far as to say that a sad Christian is not a real Christian.

All Christians should be cheerful because all by their spiritual birth at Holy Baptism are members of the family of the redeemed, whereas by natural birth all are members of the family of the lost. Yes, salvation is God's gift to us and Calvary's victim, our Lord Jesus Christ, paid for this gift with His own precious blood. He paid the price cheerfully since "for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame." His joy is without compare for He is the King of Saints,—King of His redeemed subjects who make up His jewels in His glorious and eternal Kingdom. Now you and I can be joyful and cheerful as we keep ourselves on the way of eternal salvation by taking each step in the path of holiness cheerfully and by recovering each backward step taken through human frailty with two steps forward taken through God's good grace. Walking in the path of holiness is exhilarating. It is exciting joy.

We may not know many people but we all know that mythical figure named "Calamity Jane." Indeed she is too real at times to be even mythical. She buzzes about and relays to any victimized listener the latest reports of griefs and pains and misfortunes and accidents and all the gloomy rest. She "sees all and knows all," yet not all. She sees and knows only the bad. If you would keep cheerful and not commit murder cross the street when you see her coming or leave the room when she penetrates it with her doleful mien. If she corners you and says "you must have many clouds in your life too" remain long enough to reply, "Clouds! why, yes. If I had no clouds where would all the blessed showers come from?"

However, even though we are successful in avoiding Calamity Janes, we ourselves sometimes are "all of a flutter." We are ill at ease. Everything is going the wrong way. It is a question of just one... problem after another. Our monotonous song, deadly sad, goes: "I have a problem. You have a problem. He has a problem. We have problems. You have problems. They have problems." And the song is marked "Repeat."

Try to recognize that there are no problems, just relationships. We are members of God's family of the redeemed and so we bear relationships to God and to our fellow Christians. If these are good we are cheerful. If these are bad we are sad. We are also members of the human race and so we bear relationships to the other members of the human race wherever they may be. If these relationships are good we are cheerful. If these are bad we are sad. The gloom in the world today is the result of bad relationships, whether between nations or individuals.

Now fear is the greatest enemy of cheerfulness. We are afraid that we may have disobeyed some law of God although we are not sure which law this is. Let St. Francis de Sales say to us “Love obedience rather than fear disobedience.” You see such fear leads to scrupulosity which is nothing short of damnable. The scrupulous individual is sure that he has committed sins of which he is not conscious. He indulges in gloomy thoughts and fancies. What he is really doing is turning in on self to such an extent that he ends up by glorying in his own failings. Of all things to glory in! The pity of it is that the failings that he fears for himself are not there. He places himself in the company of those sad individuals whom the Psalmist describes thus “They were afraid where no fear was.” He is sad and dejected over his possible sins even after God in His mercy has removed all the guilt connected with these by His gracious pardon. Scrupulosity deals the death blow to cheerfulness but what is worse it is only an imaginary blow.

Many become sad because they are sure they are going to be hurt. Their lives like all lives are accompanied by disappointments and injustices and heartbreaks and pains which they feel will be their ruination. Have you ever encountered a swarm of bees occupying the narrow path which you must take to complete your journey? Were you afraid to go through the swarm for fear that you, might be stung and suffer for hours afterward and become unrecognizable by your friends? Of course in such a case your fear will become a pressing reality if you thrash about and hit as many bees as you can to get them out of your way. But if you calmly move forward and with as little motion as possible, you will reach your destination unstung. (These tactics are not advised if it is a mad bull that is in your path, or a man-eating tiger.) Well, if we stop thrashing about in all of our daily difficulties and calmly accept those things over which we have no control, we shall know what a merry heart is. We are sad and fearful when we resent everything that threatens to obstruct what we think is our happy progress, whereas we should spend our energy in resenting one thing and one only,—sin. We must not resent temptation. We must not resent our human limitations. Rather we must gladly accept these as God’s will, since everything is the will of God except sin. That is our will! Even when we fall on the battlefield of life by committing sin, we should cheerfully get up and go on toward the next fight, seeking further grace from God for a new victory. It is not falling on the battlefield that is so bad, but rather staying down.

We owe it to God to be cheerful. We owe it to ourselves as precious in His eyes to be cheerful. We owe it to those with whom we come into daily contact, since they are precious in God’s eyes, to be cheerful. Best of all, cheerfulness is infectious. It spreads. A very sick person in a hospital was once asked by a Calamity Jane type of visitor (all such should ordinarily be barred at the entrance) “Are your nights interminable?” and received the ready reply “No, I lie very still and count up my blessings.” That patient, you may be sure, spread cheer throughout the entire hospital. Or again, a happy soul was once asked by a sad, ruffled person “How is it that you always keep so cheerful?” and received for an answer “I avoid both criticism and adulation by feigning ear trouble.”

Are you sad? If so you will injure your own spiritual health and possibly commit the sin of despair which is the sin against the Holy Ghost. Also you will spread gloom. Are you cheerful? Then you will enjoy spiritual health and live for the praise and glory of God. Also you will give a lift to others.

Pray for cheerfulness. We Christians have every right to be cheerful and no right to be sad. May we joyfully claim our right following upon our innumerable privileges!