

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Twelve months have gone by since the last letter I wrote to you. Twelve months: A space of time in which there were happy moments and also moments which were painful, difficult to live. But, whatever the circumstances are, we are getting a little closer to that glorious kingdom which will be established on this earth. It is, therefore, without growing slack that we must strive to achieve something of lasting value, something truly meaningful which brings joy into our lives despite trials.

As Solomon said, there is an evil which we see under the sun. There are many people who rejoice over the adversity of others. That is a common behavior in this world, a behavior which will not remain unpunished, for we read, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him" (Prov. 24:17-18). And then God adds, ". . . he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished" (Prov. 17:5). God does not allow us to feel some satisfaction, even when it is one of our enemies who is in adversity. That is a manifestation of the flesh which must be destroyed.

Of course, God does not condemn the emotion or the feeling which leads to smiling or laughing providing it comes from a heart which is under control. A smile can be derisive and hypocritical, but if it is sincere, honest, and it reflects affection and concern for others, it can be like a good word. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad" (Prov. 12:25). A smile as a good word can be some rest for the weary being, it can be some courage for the despondent spirit, it can be some comfort for a grieving heart. A smile can be a true antidote to many sorrows. Furthermore, a smile does not cost anything and can produce much; it can enrich the one who receives it without impoverishing the one who gives it.

God wants us, as the called, to be generous in this regard. Even if someone denies you the smile which you deserve, be generous, give your smile. For no one indeed has as

much need of a smile as one who cannot smile to others. God gives us the following command, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Ph'p. 4:4). That is certainly not something which is easy to maintain in our life amidst the world in which we live. But rejoicing in the Lord always is not an ephemeral, momentary, joy; quite the contrary, it is a joy which enriches our hearts and minds. That is why the smile of a person who possesses such a joy can be most vital to a distressed heart or a despondent spirit.

In our society we meet people who laugh about anything and about nothing. As Solomon wrote, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" (Eccl. 7:6). Yes, indeed! For, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness" (Prov. 14:13). That is the reason why many people become dependent on various drugs in different forms, whether of a mental nature or of a physical nature, in order to find some momentary joy which takes them away for a short while from the realities of life—the routine of life.

Conversely, we can meet people who do not laugh very much but whose hearts and minds are filled with joy and who are by their communication a source of comfort for others. Why does God require that of His called, by saying to us in simple terms, "Rejoice always"? (I Thes. 5:16, RSV) How is it that some called possess that joy which allows them to react favorably to all the situations and all the circumstances of life, while in others that joy disappears?

Initially that joy was given. We read, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10). Here those good tidings were the birth of Christ on this earth, the One who said, *I am the Word made flesh, I am the resurrection and the life*. And it is those good tidings which we heard at the time of our call; it was news which filled us with joy and enthusiasm, because for the very first time we were made aware of the existence of a way of life and promises in which there would not be a shadow of turning. The day of our call was the day when the light sprang up and we experienced a great joy, an emotion which we had never felt before. Thus the people who can pull themselves out of the abyss of circumstances which happen around them or in their own lives and can bring out that fruit of God's Holy Spirit, which is joy, are people who have kept an implicit faith in the Truth of God and in the operation of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. They have kept their first love for that gift which God has given to them.

There are many exhortations to rejoice and there are many reasons for which we can rejoice. We read, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (I Pet. 1:8-9). If we know, if we understand God's true intent, His true purpose, then we have no doubt and no anxiety whatever the trials and

the difficulties we go through momentarily. We know that these things can be and will be favorably resolved, thanks to God, at the time which He has chosen for His intervention. Another reason for which we can rejoice: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psa. 32:1). If we are willing to admit our mistakes, if we confess our problems to God, and He knows that we have learned the necessary lessons from them, then ". . . he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). A reconciliation has been made; then it only remains for us to accept it with joy. It is a joy which is given to us and which can be manifested in our lives every time we live according to God's law, every time we manifest an implicit trust in the promises which God gave to us and enabled us to understand.

God called us, He gave us to understand His purpose concerning salvation, He begot us by His Spirit, therefore Jesus Christ says to us, ". . . but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The Apostle Paul adds, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). The true foundation on which rests that joy which no one can take away from you is that faith in the statements of God and that confidence in the acceptance of the life of Jesus Christ in us so that the will of God may be fulfilled in our lives.

Those in whom that joy disappears are those in whom faith and confidence are lacking. That is why they let themselves be troubled, shattered by certain circumstances of life. The love for that call, for that knowledge which they received, waxes cold, so the true joy disappears.

In Psalm 64:10 we read, "The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him [Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord, and take refuge in him! RSV] . . ." It is not something which comes naturally. That joy results from the effort which we put forth in obedience and confidence in God. Jesus Christ is our model of perfection, He understood all things, He had no doubt when He addressed God, the Father. That produced in Him a tremendous joy despite all the difficulties, despite all the persecutions which He had to endure on this earth. That is why He says to us, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). Thus that joy which is in the hearts and the minds of those who live with a good orientation is the joy of Jesus Christ, it is His life lived in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The more we crush the self, the more we apply ourselves to living the Truth of God, the more we have faith in His promises, in His interventions, the more abundant that joy is in us.

Despite the trials and the difficult times which we are going through, that joy which Jesus Christ gives to us can still be manifested in our lives. It is a treasure which moth and rust cannot corrupt, and which thieves cannot steal. In fact we are the only ones who can

impoverish ourselves with regard to this wonderful gift by refusing to respond to the influences of God's Holy Spirit.

Rejoice in the Lord always! The day comes when it will not be possible for us to do otherwise, for we will be forever with the Lord. And with Him we will teach this world what is true joy. Meanwhile be as it is written to the Colossians, "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11).

To you all my most affectionate and respectful thoughts,

Jean Aviolat