2nd Sunday of Easter 2 (Acts 4:23-35; 1 Jn 5:1-6; Jn 20:19-31

 **JOY IS LONELINESS OVERCOME**

The Holy Spirit’s gift to us is joy in the presence of the risen Christ among us.

There are many substitutes for joy, such as noisy gaiety, loud laughter, animated chatter, and bubbly fun. But we keep up our conventional pretences only because they are supposed to save us from desperate loneliness. Even so, they are only escapes into distraction, and they are false redemptions. They lose their attraction when we experience genuine joy.

St Francis made up a story to demonstrate what he called “perfect joy.” He said that when others or circumstances treat us badly, if we cope with them without letting them affect us adversely, and even grow through them, then we have God’s gift of perfect joy.

A Japanese Secular Franciscan asked me to explain this puzzling story. He had told me that when he was eight years old, not a Christian, and orphaned in Tokyo after allied bombing had razed it, he had walked the streets singing happy songs to cheer up the distraught people. I told him that then he had God’s gift of perfect joy.

Joy is loneliness overcome. Joy is sadness, sorrow and isolation conquered. Real joy comes with the experience that we are capable of loving and that we are loved in return. The disciples hid behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews,” but they were “filled with joy when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). His death no longer saddened them, nor did they feel sorry for themselves. He came to them, gave them his peace, dispelled their loneliness, and inspired them to love. They proceeded to witness “to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and they were all given great respect” (Acts 4:33). They found they could love the people whom they first feared, and who often loved them in return.

Joy blooms out of hard soil. Like an orchid, planted in charcoal, joy can flourish in the burnt and broken pieces of our life. The flower of joy is not one of those that delights only for a day. But, like an orchid, it is hardy, long-lasting, and exquisite.

St John gives his reason for writing his gospel: “These (signs) are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name” (Jn 20:31).

Like St John, Christians who have experienced true joy are keen to share it with others. We help Jesus to be born in others, because “anyone who has been begotten by God has already overcome the world; this is the victory over the world ‑ our faith" (1 John 5: 4).

 We know the joy that faith in Jesus has brought to our own life. We delight in the personal company of our Saviour, and we rejoice that he has overcome our loneliness. The fullness of life, joy, and peace that he brings with him, are our most valued possessions.

As the Father sent him, so he sends us (cf. John 20: 21). An essential condition of our being joyful is to involve ourselves in the sadness, sorrow, and loneliness of others, taking the burdens of others on ourselves, dispelling their sadness, creating joy among people around us, like that little orphaned Japanese boy whom God gifted later with Christian faith.

We have the picture of the first Christian community in Jerusalem: “The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul” (Acts 4: 52). We find joy not by going all out to get it for ourselves, but by giving joy to others. We are overjoyed at the part that God our Father has chosen for us to play in overcoming the loneliness of our fellows.

“No one (in the Jerusalem community) claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common ... None of their members was ever in want ... (they sold their possessions, and the money) was then distributed to any member who might be in need” (Acts 4: 32, 55).

We experience Christian joy when we invest our joy in giving. Then, not only do we conquer sorrow and isolation in the lives of others, but we also overcome loneliness in ourselves.