

This article first appeared in the August 2017 print edition of Catholic Family News (subscribe [HERE](#); current subscribers can access the E-Edition [HERE](#)).

During His sublime discourse to the Apostles on the eve of His Passion, Our Lord explained the nature of our relationship to Him in the spiritual life as follows:

I am the true vine; and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He will take away: and every one that beareth fruit, He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. *I am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing.* If any one abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you. *In this is My Father glorified; that you bring forth very much fruit, and become My disciples.* (John 15:1-2, 4-8)

While the “fruit” Our Lord speaks of certainly includes exterior works (e.g., the corporal and spiritual works of mercy), it seems the primary “fruit” He calls us to produce - or rather, desires to produce *in us* - is that of *interior conversion*, which manifests as “the fruit of the Spirit”, namely: “charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Fr. John Hardon, S.J. explains in his *Pocket Catholic Dictionary* that these fruits listed by St. Paul are “identifiable effects of the Holy Spirit” in our souls.[1] Our Lord tells us, “By their fruits you shall know them,” and “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit: neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:16, 18). With humility, then, we must take stock of the fruits we ourselves are producing (rather than focusing on our neighbor, which is so easy to do) and make sure we are allowing the Holy Ghost to cultivate His good fruits in our hearts, minds, and actions. All His fruits are important, of course, but for the present, let us examine more closely the fruits of joy, peace, and patience.

The Joy of the Lord

Amid the difficulties and “cares of this life” (Luke 21:34), we sometimes forget that God wants us to be joyful, that He created us to share in His own eternal joy. Being made in His image and likeness, we all naturally desire happiness, although many are confused about

how to attain it. So how do we transcend the fleeting delights found in natural goods and experience the supernatural joy of the Lord? Jesus gives us a clue in His Last Supper discourse, when He says: “As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you. *Abide in My love.* If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; as I also have kept My Father’s commandments, and do abide in His love. *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled*” (John 15:9-11).

Our Lord shows us that true and lasting joy is a fruit of *charity*, the very life of God Himself, which we first receive through Baptism, “the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrates how charity produces joy in his *Summa Theologiae*:

It is written: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, Who is given to us” (Rom. 5:5). But joy is caused in us by the Holy Ghost according to Romans 14:17: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” *Therefore, charity is a cause of joy.*

He [goes on](#) to explain:

[W]hen we were treating of the passions [in a previous section of the *Summa*], joy and sorrow proceed from love, but in contrary ways. For joy is caused by love, either through the presence of the thing loved, or because the proper good of the thing loved exists and endures in it; and the latter is the case chiefly in the love of benevolence, whereby a man rejoices in the well-being of his friend, though he be absent. On the other hand, sorrow arises from love, either through the absence of the thing loved, or because the loved object to which we wish well, is deprived of its good or afflicted with some evil. *Now charity is love of God, Whose good is unchangeable, since He is His goodness, and from the very fact that He is loved, He is in those who love Him by His most excellent effect,* according to 1 John 4:16: “He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.” *Therefore, spiritual joy, which is about God, is caused by charity.*[2]

The more we grow in our exercise of charity, by loving God and our neighbor as Jesus taught us, the more firmly we will abide in His love and be filled with His joy. Our lives on earth will still involve suffering, for it is “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21), but the same Lord Who commands us to take up our cross

daily and follow Him (see Luke 9:23) also says: “Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened: and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is sweet and My burden light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

There is, of course, a time and a place in life for sorrow (e.g., compunction of heart for our sins, grief due to the loss of a loved one), but we must be careful not to let it consume us. St. Francis de Sales, renowned bishop and doctor of the Church, wrote about sorrow and how to deal with it in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*:

“Sorrow that is according to God produces penance that surely tends to salvation, whereas the sorrow that is according to the world produces death,” says St. Paul [2 Cor. 7:10]. *Sorrow, then, can either be good or evil according to its different ways of affecting us. True enough, it produces more bad effects than good, for it has only two good effects, namely, compassion and repentance, whereas it has six evil effects, namely, anxiety, sloth, wrath, jealousy, envy, and impatience. ...*

The enemy uses sorrow to set temptations before good men. Just as he tries to make the wicked rejoice in their sins, so also he tries to make the good grieve over their virtues and good works, and just as he cannot bring men to do evil except by making it look attractive, so also he cannot turn us away from good except by making it look disagreeable. The evil one is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he himself is sad and melancholy and will be so for all eternity. Hence, he desires that everyone should be like himself.

Evil sorrow disturbs and upsets the soul, arouses inordinate fears, creates disgust for prayer, stupefies and oppresses the brain, deprives the mind of prudence, resolution, judgment, and courage, and destroys its strength. In a word, it is like a severe winter which spoils all the beauty of the country and weakens all the animals. It takes away all sweetness from the soul and renders it disabled and impotent in all its faculties.[3]

After describing the malady, St. Francis prescribes the following remedies: prayer[4], perseverance in good works, singing spiritual songs[5], external acts of devotion, bearing one’s soul to a trusted priest, and humble resignation to God’s will. He concludes by assuring his readers: “Do not doubt that after God has put you on trial He will deliver you from this evil”[6].

Truly, “the joy of the Lord is our strength” (2 Esd. 8:10) and our refreshment in this vale of tears, as St. Peter reminds us: “Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you; but if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12-13). Our Lord Himself says the same: “Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven” (Matt. 5:11-12).

The Peace of Christ

Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum – “the peace of the Lord be always with you.” We hear these words just prior to the *Agnus Dei* during Holy Mass. And after the *Agnus Dei*, the priest prays in preparation for Holy Communion: “O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst say to Thine Apostles: Peace I leave you, My peace I give unto you: look not upon my sins but upon the faith of Thy Church; and deign to give her that peace and unity which is in accord with Thy will: Who livest and reignest God, world without end. Amen.” Jesus spoke about the gift of His peace, like His joy, during the same Last Supper discourse: “*Peace I leave with you: My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you.* Let not your heart be troubled: nor let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Notice how He emphasizes that “not as the world giveth, do I give unto you.” What, exactly, distinguishes the peace of Christ from worldly peace?

St. Thomas observes that true peace, another fruit of charity, is first and foremost something interior – namely, a right ordering of our appetites (desires). He quotes St. Augustine’s definition (“peace is tranquility of order”) and [explains](#) that “tranquility consists in all the appetitive movements in one man being set at rest together.” This mention of “rest” brings to mind another [famous line](#) from Augustine found at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You.” The primary object of our desire must be God Himself, the Supreme Good. Only when we allow Him to detach us from the endless pursuit of finite goods will we experience “the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding” (Philip. 4:7). This requires us to “put off ... the old man” of sin, “who is corrupted according to the desire of error” and “put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:22, 24). As St. Paul explains elsewhere, we must reckon ourselves “dead to sin, but alive unto God” (Rom. 6:11) as a result of our dying with Christ through Baptism and rising with Him to the life of grace.

Interior peace of soul, a fruit of God’s purifying love, is thus necessary for authentic and lasting peace with our neighbor. St. James touches on this truth in his epistle: “From

whence are wars and contentions among you? Are they not hence, from your concupiscences, which war in your members?" (Jam. 4:1). In other words, the root of all conflicts among individuals, families, and nations is ultimately a lack of God's peace in the soul. If we desire peace in our relationships with others, we must first "let the peace of Christ rejoice in [our own] hearts" (Col. 3:15). Then, and only then, will we be able to love - not only those who love us, but even our enemies, as Our Lord commands (see Matt. 5:43-48) and St. Paul exhorts:

If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men. Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. But if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink. For, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good. (Rom. 12:18-21)

Patient Endurance

Finally, to preserve joy and peace in the midst of adversity, we must have patience. The Holy Ghost produces this good fruit in our souls by moving us to exercise, in particular, the virtue of hope and the gift of fortitude by which we look forward with confidence to the promise of heavenly glory and resolve to "persevere unto the end" - even unto martyrdom - and thus "be saved" (Matt. 10:22). As part of the "pruning process" mentioned by Jesus as necessary for our spiritual growth (see John 15 above), our heavenly Father often uses trials and suffering as the means of refining us, as it is written in the Book of Ecclesiasticus:

Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. *Humble thy heart, and endure: incline thy ear, and receive the words of understanding: and make not haste in the time of clouds. Wait on God with patience: join thyself to God, and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.* Believe God, and He will recover thee: and direct thy way, and trust in Him. Keep His fear, and grow old therein. Ye that fear the Lord, wait for His mercy: and go not aside from Him, lest ye fall. Ye that fear the Lord, believe Him: and your reward shall not be made void. *Ye that fear the Lord, hope in Him: and mercy shall come to you for your delight.* Ye that fear the Lord, love Him, and your hearts shall be

enlightened. My children, behold the generations of men: and know ye that *no one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded*. For who hath continued in his commandment, and hath been forsaken? or who hath called upon Him, and He despised him? *For God is compassionate and merciful*, and will forgive sins in the day of tribulation: and He is a protector to all that seek Him in truth. (Ecclus. 2:1-10)

We find the very same message repeated on the pages of the New Testament. “For *patience is necessary* for you,” says St. Paul, “that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36). St. James goes even further, proclaiming: “My brethren, *count it all joy* when you shall fall into divers temptations; *knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience*. And patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing. ... *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive a crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:2-4, 12). And Our Lord promises, “In your patience you shall possess your souls” (Luke 21:19).

Abide in Christ

“I am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing,” says Our Lord (John 15:5). Let us, therefore, abide in Him through daily prayer; frequent resort to Confession and reception of Holy Communion; and true devotion to Mary, which St. Louis de Montfort calls “the true Tree of Life.” By these means, the Holy Ghost will surely produce His good fruits in our souls and help us abound in good works.

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 15:13).

Want more great Catholic content? [SUBSCRIBE](#) to Catholic Family News and help support our work! [DONATIONS](#) are also accepted and greatly appreciated. God bless you and thanks for reading!

Notes:

[1] See Fr. John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 157 (Fruits of the Holy Spirit).

[2] *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 28, a. 1. Notice how St. Thomas distinguishes between love as a passion (a feeling based on the enjoyment of a good possessed) and love as the virtue of charity (to will the good of the other).

[3] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. by John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 2003 ed.), p. 241.

[4] He cites James 5:13: “Is any of you sad? Let him pray.”

[5] The Book of Psalms, which constitutes a majority of the Church’s Divine Office, is replete with exhortations to “[b]e glad in the Lord” (Ps. 31:11), “[r]ejoice in the Lord” (Ps. 32:1), “[d]elight in the Lord” (Ps. 36:4), “praise the Lord with joy” (Ps. 94:1), and “[s]ing joyfully to God” (Ps. 99:2). The New Testament contains similar passages (see Eph. 5:18-19, Col. 3:16).

[6] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, p. 243.