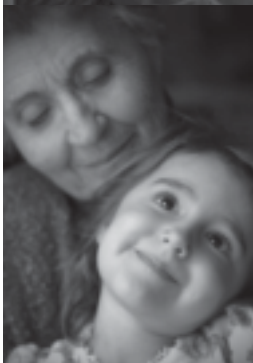




LIVING OUR CATHOLICISM...

THAT OUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE



A PASTORAL LETTER
TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD
IN
THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS IN TENNESSEE

MOST REVEREND J. TERRY STEIB, S.V.D.
BISHOP OF MEMPHIS IN TENNESSEE



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Preface

Sisters and Brothers,

During the past year, I have taken every opportunity to express to you my hope that all Catholics in the Diocese of Memphis would take a new look at ourselves as individuals and as a community in order to re-discover that flame of gratitude within us that fosters deep joy in the gift of being Catholic. I have portrayed this inner search as a journey leading us to the core of who we are as church, and as individuals who make up that church.

As I travel both within and outside of our diocese, I find that, everywhere, individuals are desperately seeking fulfillment, peace and happiness. Even in my encounters with other Catholic people, it is not unusual to hear admissions of restlessness and uncertainty flowing through the stuff of their everyday lives. Thousands of prescriptions for happiness in life are proffered, but most are trite and limited. People wonder if joy is merely a fleeting moment of pleasure and freedom from pain, or if it is something more enduring. They question whether joy refers to some kind of relatively constant state of being, and if so, whether such a state is possible. With all the tensions, demands, stressors, and responsibilities we face in the everydayness of the Christian journey, people speculate whether joy is something we can hope for some day, somehow, or if it is something we can and even should expect at the moment.

As I think about our life's journey and the joy I am convinced God wants to give us along the way, I am reminded of a comic strip depicting Charlie Brown who asks Linus what he wants to be when he grows up. Linus replies, "Outrageously happy!" We can understand where Linus is coming from. But in a world such as ours, is it possible to be outrageously happy all the time?

Jesus preached in the synagogue, “He has sent me to bring glad tidings.” The “glad tidings,” the good news of Jesus Christ, flooded the spirit of the apostle Paul to overflowing. No amount of hardship and suffering could dampen his spirit of Christian joy or prevent him from sharing it with others. The story of St. Paul’s immense struggles to spread glad tidings is nothing less than incredible. And the most incredible part of it is that this person - who suffered so much - felt and expressed so much joy.

In the second letter to the Corinthians (11:24-27), St. Paul recalls some of the things that had happened to him:

Five times I had the thirty-nine lashes.

Three times I have been beaten with sticks; once I was stoned.

Three times I have been shipwrecked.”

I have worked and labored, often without sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty and often starving. I have been in the cold without clothes.

And this is just a partial list! Yet to the very end, St. Paul’s spirit was drenched with joy. “I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord,” he writes to the Philippians. “I repeat, what I want is your happiness (4:4-5).”

How can someone who experienced so much suffering also experience so much joy? St. Paul gives us the answer. He tells the Philippians, “The Lord is very near. There is no need to worry (4:5-6).”

In my last pastoral letter, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of God’s Love*, we reflected on God’s love as we come to know it through the Eucharist. In this letter, sisters and brothers, let us place our attention on the effects of the Eucharist in our daily lives – those times when we are invited to choose love so that our joy may be complete. I am hopeful that we can, together as a diocesan church, search for and find again true joy in our Catholic way of life.

I. Introduction

1. The title I chose for this pastoral letter expresses what I hope to impart to you: that our Catholic way of life is a great and wonderful gift from God, and that when we truly live it, we might not be “outrageously happy,” but we will live with and in deep joy. Before Jesus’ passion and death, he prayed for his disciples. He asked God to allow that his joy might be in them, and that their joy might be complete (John 17:13). He wanted the joy that he himself experienced – the joy he knew from being in constant communion with God – to be in us. Even though the joy we experience in the next life surpasses all we can know or imagine now, we are nonetheless invited and expected to find great joy NOW by living as Jesus lived. Jesus’ joy was rooted in living in God – in God’s love, in God’s peace, in God’s will. The same is true for us.

2. As in my last pastoral letter, once again I ask you to give the content of this letter your attention in some very significant ways:

- a. Please set aside some time for prayerful reading of this letter, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you about your own life with God as you read and reflect.
- b. Please spend some time in diocesan and parish groups in which you already participate to include me in your meetings by sharing your reflections on my thoughts as I have written them here. There are currently so many parish and diocesan groups: prayer groups, bible study groups, men’s groups and women’s groups, social justice committees, altar guilds, liturgical ministry groups, various small Christian communities, parish pastoral councils, finance councils and ministry teams. In these groups so many of you are already actively engaged in

discussing and living our faith within our local church. Rather than forming new groups to discuss this pastoral letter, I would be so pleased to know that every time you gather, you take some time to share your faith as you are invited and challenged to live it in your unique walks of life and in our communal life as church.

- c. Finally, it is my sincere hope that discussions of faith will take place in everyday settings with family and friends. At lunch with co-workers and at dinner with family, on the golf course, in the sewing circle and in the mall, I pray that you will be comfortable talking honestly about matters of faith, about what being Catholic means to each of you.

II. How do we view Catholicism?

3. Because we are human beings, we seek happiness. It is part of our nature. As Catholics, we believe that the greatest happiness, the deepest joy, is found in union with God as lived out in the church in which we were baptized.

4. We all have memories that are connected with a particular growth spurt in our life of faith. I would like to share one of mine with you. When I was a young boy, after attending Sunday Mass, I used to sit outside and listen to the music coming from the little Baptist church across the way. It was spirited, to say the least. There was one woman whose voice soared high into the rafters, through the church windows and across the sugar cane fields. There was something in her voice that captivated my youthful desire for God. Her singing was permeated with joy. Hers was not a surface happiness, I knew. Her joy ran deep – as deep as all she had survived in order to proclaim in song that Jesus was indeed her Savior. So great was the joy I sensed when she sang that, even now, the memory of her voice connects for me the young boy seeking God to the adult priest and bishop of today who yearns to share that joy with you.

5. Over and over again, I have observed the need for the kind of faith-filled joy that I heard in that Louisiana woman's singing. Unfortunately, many people – sometimes even Catholic people – think of the Catholic Church as merely the institutional organization that is headed by the bishop of Rome, that requires attendance at Sunday Mass and Holy Days, and has more rules than the US tax code. It is no wonder that not too many people are charmed by this understanding of the Catholic Church and that they are not especially joyful when they think about it. Some believe that Catholicism consists of remaining loyal to this institution and following the rules, thereby avoiding going to hell. If this is how many Catholics see the church, it is no wonder that many do not derive joy from being Catholic.

6. We know that Catholicism is not, in essence, a collection of ideas to which we must subscribe, prohibitions and regulations we must obey, or obligations we must fulfill. Of course, the Catholic way of life does involve particular beliefs and ways of relating to God and to others. While regulations, prohibitions, obligations and expectations are part of the Catholic way of life, our way of life is certainly not reducible to those expectations. Sisters and brothers, our sacred scriptures, tradition and the great teachers and saints of the church proclaim a much more profound hope for us.

7. So, we might ask at this point: “What is the true nature of the Christian joy that is an inherent part of being Catholic?” Dictionaries do not help much. They tell us that joy is: “Intense and especially ecstatic or exultant happiness.” I will not argue with that definition, but we know that even when we live out our Catholic lives an intense or exultant happiness is not going to be with us twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

8. Again we turn to the Scriptures. We find in St. Paul that authentic joy is not something we manufacture. It is a pure gift of God’s love and of God’s grace. God gives joy because God loves us. It really is that simple, and at the same time, that profound.

9. Picture with me, if you will, parents trying to gently nudge a smile from a tiny baby. When the child smiles, something happens to the parents also; they light up with a smile of their own. I believe that what parents are feeling at that point is true joy. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us: “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.”¹ What is key in the work of St Thomas Aquinas is that he reminds us that joy is caused by love. That’s why parents have joy when their child smiles. They love the child, and their joy is caused by that love. But Aquinas is also telling

1 *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas, Question 28, # 1

us that joy exists when the good of the thing loved exists and endures in it. So, to live our lives as Catholics is to love the Church and Jesus whom we find in it and to strive to live in God – in God’s will and in God’s love. It is only then that joy will permeate all of life, because all of life flows from and becomes an expression of God’s unfathomable love.

III. Only in God

10. The great Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis titled his own autobiography: *Surprised by Joy*. In it, he describes joy as a desire that is paradoxically fulfilling and life-giving by the very fact that it is never fulfilled, at least in this life. Lewis describes it as, “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.” What Lewis describes here is nothing less than our longing for God. It is reminiscent of St. Augustine’s cry that, “our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in thee,”² or of Psalm 62 which proclaims that, “only in God is my soul at rest.”

11. Our love for God and God’s love for us is, in the end, experienced as desire because its final fulfillment comes only when we behold God and God’s infinite love for us face to face in heaven. But in the meantime, the longing remains, the desire beckons. And the theme of St. Thomas Aquinas returns: “Joy is caused by love.”

12. This deep desire for God, which is God’s love for us, does not appear at first precisely as a desire for God; normally it emerges initially as a simple human desire for just about anything we want very badly; usually things that may seem as far from God as one could imagine. In childhood it might be the desire for the latest toy or video game advertised on TV; as a teen it could be winning the state championship in football or getting a new car; or it could be that one and only first love that seems to crush the heart. As we move into adulthood our yearnings grow in size: that house we have always dreamed of, the new promotion at work, having our children achieve greater success than we did.

13. In truth, life unfolds for us as one successive desire after another. Some are achieved; others are not. But whether or not they are achieved,

2 Cap 1. *Confessions*. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

we always move past them to wanting something else. They never satisfy completely. They never deliver what they promise. And so time and again we are left holding the bag, stumped that what we once longed for with all our heart, having been now achieved, leaves us cold and empty. “Why?” we ask. And coming to this very question opens us finally to see that every desire of the human heart will only find its true home in the loving embrace of God.

14. In his work, *The Good Book*, Peter Gomes, chaplain at Harvard University, describes a portion of the history and sociology of our country and its search for the good life. Gomes points out that there is a wonderful, but for many, troubling answer to the difficulties our comfort-seeking society can present to caring Christians. “See the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, yet I assure you not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these (Matt. 6: 28).” Jesus reminds us of the beauty of a field lily and then goes on to say: “Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well (Matt 6:33).”

15. And so it is that our desire for God, not conjured up but discovered within our heart and out of our own life’s skirmishes, gives a kind of order and direction to every other desire – to where it is that we “set our hearts.” We are delighted to find that, if we cooperate with Grace, our desire for God tames all other desires. And in the taming, we find out that whatever comes our way – be it success, or disappointment, health or sickness, fortune or ruin – a deeper reality in us goes unshaken and provides a wellspring of life, energy, and joy. All this is possible, though, only if we are willing to name the desire for what, or who it really is: God. Once we own up to this truth, we can claim the desire. And in the claiming, we begin to experience and to grow in living with authentic joy as Catholics.

IV. Paradox of a Human God: The Word became Flesh

16. Pope Benedict XVI, in his book entitled *Jesus of Nazareth*, says: “Among all the paths of history, the path to God is the true direction that we must seek and find.”³ And where will we find that path to God? How can we be sure that it is God? How can we trust that there really is someone on the other end of the line? Will the proverbial “yellow brick road,” along which the desire seems to direct us, really lead to the Emerald City? Can we find the companionship of God in the midst of the inevitable suffering along the way and can that suffering be redemptive? Is there really solid ground on which to stand that can give substance to our conclusion that the deepest longing of our heart is Almighty God calling us like a lover, into His tender and eternal embrace?

17. The answer is not very far away. Every Sunday we Catholics proclaim our faith by reciting the words of the Nicene Creed. “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God”... we say. We believe that he is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God...who by the power of the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary and became Man.” What does this high bound creedal formula have to do with the very intimate experience of longing in our hearts for the God who beckons? Everything! What we experience as desire is God the Word beckoning. And it is only by faith that we know the truth of this Word deep in our hearts.

18. It is important for us to remember that our Catholic way of life has its roots in the life of the Jewish people who were chosen by God to reveal God’s presence, majesty, justice and mercy to the world. It is from the original People of God that Jesus was born, a people whom the Lord gathered together and liberated from slavery in Egypt, and blessed

3 *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI, p. 4

with Torah, and sages and prophets. Jesus grew up a Jew, reveling in the Torah, commenting on it even as a child and developing his human relationship with the God he so intimately called Abba, Father. Having thus been formed in a communal and exquisitely personal relationship with God, Jesus began to teach his understanding of God and humanity to those whom he chose to be his disciples.

19. Our Catholic faith does not emerge from an idea. It is not primarily a philosophy of life. It is not primarily a code to live by. Our faith rests on a real, historical person – Jesus of Nazareth – who literally embodied God for us. Sometimes, I think we too easily take for granted this astounding fact that God entered our history, took on the life of his creatures and became one of us! Because we profess this truth as the ground of our faith over and over again, the impact of how really outrageous this is can easily escape us. Still, we do not have to conjure up images. We do not have to rely on our imagination alone. The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us; and from that time on, everything is different.

20. But how do we encounter this Word made Flesh here and now, this Jesus who is God Incarnate? If it happened in history, then one could think it is over and done with. Well, yes and no. It is over and done with in its historicity; but not in its absolute reality. The entire Christ event, the coming of the Word among us and the powerful redemption he wrought by his death and resurrection—all this remains alive and well in the heart of God and therefore available to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through liturgical rites and symbols, in word and sacrament, in our interactions with one another, the Word made Flesh continues to be enfleshed by us, for us and among us here and now.

V. Re-envisioning our Catholic Way of Life

21. The way of life that Jesus taught is portrayed in a common theme throughout the writings of the early church in biblical and post-biblical times. Even in the midst of great suffering, the early Christians expressed the genuine joy that came from their way of living. The Acts of the Apostles, for example, is filled with expressions of joy, joy stemming from what the apostles were able to do, and joy from the healings they effected in Jesus' name. Even when they were brought before the Sanhedrin and punished, they went away "rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer for the sake of the name (Acts 5:41)."

22. The Liturgy of the Hours offers more examples. During the season of Lent, the reading for Morning Prayer for the first Sunday, taken from Nehemiah 8: 9-10, encourages us not to be sad, but to rejoice, "for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength." In the intercessions of Morning Prayer for the Thursday of Epiphany week we hear: "You are the unending Word of God who flooded the world with joy at your birth. Fill us with joy by the continuous gift of your life." Clearly, there is a connection between God's Word and joy in our lives; between joy and God's continuing gift of life. And how else will we receive the continuing gift of God's joy in our lives without our Church and its path of grace which is effected in our lives through the sacraments?

23. It is clear from the Scriptures and from the Church's liturgy that those who live a life aware of their desire for God, and intentionally seeking God in all things are deeply joyful! Have you taken a look recently at grandparents? Perhaps you yourself have grandchildren. Grandparents are proud of their grandchildren, not especially for what they do, but just because they are! Grandparents are filled with what might be termed an overabundance of love. Oh yes, there are daily challenges. Maybe the

arthritis is a tinge more painful than they would like it to be. Perhaps a long-time friend has recently died. Perhaps Medicare falls short of the medical bills. But overall, most grandparents are joyful, and their joy has its roots in love. As I reflect on people like that, I cannot help but think that they are joyful because they are living their lives well; they are connected with God and with people around them in ways that give life.

24. Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, reminded us of the importance of being sensitive to God and of being loving toward our neighbor.

Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints—consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbor from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its real-ism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love.⁴

25. Our lives as faithful Catholics call us to show our love to others. When so many of our parishes take time at Christmas to have Angel Trees that give toys and clothes to children; when youth groups throughout our Diocese create and deliver food baskets to families in need; when gardens are created within a parish so that people can have fresh vegetables without having to pay for them; when Catholic Charities places an adopted child with a family; when people from our Diocese travel to some of the developing nations in our world to assist the efforts to bring dignity to the

4 *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI, # 18

lives of the native people; when we take seriously the plight of the poor right here in our own city and take action to help improve their lives – we are together as a Church showing our love for one another and our love for God. This is how we spread the kingdom and how we are Church.

VI. Intentionality

26. Intentionally acknowledging God’s love for us, accepting that love, and sharing it with others are keys to rediscovering authentic joy in being Catholic. Jesus’ teaching focused on how his disciples and friends should relate to God, to each other, and especially to the poor and needy. The disciples witnessed Jesus’ commitment to the truth of the Good News and then they gave witness to the presence of the Risen Christ. Filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the disciples set out with great courage into their world to proclaim boldly the good news that Jesus, who was crucified, was now alive. These same disciples gave structure to the Eucharist, fulfilling the command of Jesus to “do this in memory of me.”

27. The disciples valued the truth of Christ more than their continued life on earth, laying down their lives in service and self-sacrifice in order to proclaim the good news to all people. From this group of disciples, there quickly emerged many others. It was awareness of God’s love for them and a desire to spread that love that drove the early disciples in their ministries and in their prayer. This same awareness and vitality is offered to us today, and will be ours as we intentionally live in God’s love and spread God’s love to others. It is then that joy deepens and we are excited about living our Catholic way of life.

VII. God's Beloved

28. The source of our joy in living a Catholic life is awareness and acceptance of God's love for us and an active sharing of God's love with others. As Catholics, our lives are rooted in God's Word, in personal prayer, in our celebrations of the sacraments, and in sacramental living with people from our own faith community and with others. Our lives are also rooted in – and only make sense at all in – the reality that we are loved by God and that we are invited into a rich, intimate relationship of love which is lived out here on earth and forever in eternity. When we accept the truth of being God's beloved, our hearts swell with joyful response in love for God and for all of God's creation.

29. In the midst of deepening our understanding of living with joy in our Catholic faith, we remember the cross of Jesus. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and Protestant martyr reminded us in his amazing work, *The Cost of Discipleship*, if we are going to live Christian lives fully, then we cannot ignore the cross. Jesus himself reminds us that if we want to be his disciples we will have to take up the cross. One cannot follow Jesus and not be subject to the wonder, the mystery and the pain of Christ's cross in our own lives.

30. The cross of Christ and our sharing in it is one of the great mysteries of our faith. Unlike a mystery to be solved by a detective, a mystery of faith is never "solved." Rather, such mysteries unfold over a lifetime of seeking to live in union with God. As we cooperate with God's grace in our lives by participating in it, the mystery of the cross unfolds for each one of us and for us together as church. Chronic illness or loss of a loved one might be one person's cross. Another may lose a job or be called upon to go the extra mile in a particular life situation. A cross might easily be caring for a parent whose eyes no longer see as well as they once did, or

whose mind cannot cross the bridges it so easily glided over before. A cross might be a lost love in a relationship we worked hard to make whole, or what seems like a constant struggle with bills and not knowing where the next dollar is going to come from. Whatever the cross that comes into our lives, living our faith and trusting in God, makes it possible to endure that cross with hope. And one who finds God in the midst of suffering is one who comes to know God's faithfulness in ways beyond telling. Only then do we come to cherish our crosses. Only then do we come to know that resurrection and new life follow every cross. In the heaviest of crosses, God offers us himself, and in such a gift there is deep, deep joy.

31. Somewhere between the cross of hope, and the joy which the early Christians seemed to find even in the toughest moments of their lives, lies the area of living a moral life even when people living around us cannot understand our point of view. We cannot be Catholics and ignore the reality of the importance of living well together. Because we are human beings, our dignity compels us to reflect on the goodness or the evil of actions that take place in our daily lives. As Catholics we are committed to living the commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, committed to living as Jesus lived, and committed to a consistent ethic of life which demands that we protect life from the moment of conception to the time of a natural death. As Catholics, we cannot ignore the poor among us or in lands afar. We are called to welcome the marginalized in our society. We are privileged when given opportunities to serve those less fortunate than ourselves. We are called to be honest in our dealings with others, and to step up when others want to bend the rules for the sake of profit, or try to tell us that what is legal is always moral. And because we are moral we defend the planet on which we live from the growing menace that the preoccupations of this world present to its survival as we know it. As Catholics, we find joy in right living -- in living according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

VIII. That Our Joy May Be Complete

32. Jesus prayed, “That their joy may be complete.” If we are going to live our lives as Catholics whose joy is complete, as Catholics whose hearts are burning within us, there are many avenues open to us to support such a full life. It is not enough to go to Mass regularly; not enough to make sure our envelope makes it to the parish for counting; not enough to say, “I want to be buried as a Catholic, but don’t bother me until then.” Being Catholic means that we live our lives doing what Jesus asks us to do – being transformed by intentionally seeking to live with and in God’s love, and sharing that love in a variety of life-changing ways.

33. What did Jesus ask of his disciples and apostles? First he made sure that they were with him – living, learning and loving. He often led them aside to pray. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “They must be with him in order to get to know him; in order to attain that intimate acquaintance with him that could not be given to the ‘people.’”⁵ But Jesus also sent his apostles and disciples on a mission – to preach the Gospel, the good news that Jesus was and is the Messiah. Just like Jesus they preached the coming of the kingdom. In that way the disciples and apostles gathered people into a new family, a family that we know today as the Church.

5 *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI, p. 172

34. Being with Jesus and preaching his good news is not just delivering words or instructions. It is, instead, an event. Pope Benedict reminds us that we are not Catholics and Christians because of some lofty idea. We are Catholic Christians because we have had an encounter with Jesus.

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should have eternal life."⁶

Our hope as Catholic Christians is to eventually live a life with God that will never end. Because we have encountered Jesus in the Church, we know that we can find that eternal life and thus find that the joy we have as Catholics is finally and completely fulfilled.

6 *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI, # 2

IX. Conclusion

35. In this pastoral letter I have challenged all of us to move more deeply into living as faithful Catholics in every aspect of our lives. If we continue to explore the joy that comes from living out the Catholic way of life, I believe that we will begin to understand the totality of what it means to be a Catholic in the 21st Century. As we live as true disciples, we will find the joy that is an inherent part of being Catholic and that joy will draw people to ask us the source of our joy. When others question us about our faith because they see joy in us, then we can become Philip to their Nathaniel and say, as Philip did about Jesus, Come and see.

36. A final word. Prior to that final day when we are lifted up in the Lord, we are invited to experience our loving God with and in the Church. When I consecrate a new Church, I often hear pastors tell the people that even without the new building, the faith community in a particular parish would still be Church. We believe that because we are a people of God and it is that awareness that is the first indicator that we are a Church. In order for us to know Jesus as the disciples did, it is imperative for us to celebrate Christ together in our lives. And to do that we have the sacraments. Once we clearly perceive the truth of the gospel, of the reign of God which has drawn near to us, we are so filled with joy that we must celebrate that joy, not just for an hour or ninety minutes every Sunday, and not just on special occasions, but with every fiber of our being, every moment of every day we live. As Catholics, we have the great tradition of our liturgy that adds gesture, symbol and sacrament to words, forming a more complete sense of who we are and what we do as Catholic Christians. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

Since the liturgy is the exercise of the priesthood of Christ it is necessary to keep ever alive the affirmation of the disciple faced with the mysterious presence of the Lord:

‘... it is the Lord!’ Nothing of what we do in the Liturgy can appear more important than what in an unseen but real manner Christ accomplishes by the power of his Spirit. A faith alive in charity, adoration, praise of the Father and silent contemplation will always be the prime objective of liturgical and pastoral care.⁷

With these words, Pope John Paul II reminded us that the liturgies that bind us together as a Church help us to be in touch with Jesus, to find in the Lord that strength that he wants his disciples to have so that they will “know” him and from his strength gain strength to live the kind of life that being Catholic entails.

37. There is much more that I want to say to you about living our Catholic way of life and I will. In subsequent pastoral letters we will explore together the gift of the incarnation as we ask the question Jesus asked: “Who do you say that I am?” In another letter we will look together at what it means to “Worship in spirit and in truth” as we explore the riches of our worship and what it means that we Catholics are a sacramental people.

I pray that God will help you to understand better the great gift of living a Catholic life immersed in the One who is the source of all our joy.

In the Divine Word,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Terry Steib, S.V.D." with a cross symbol to the left of the name.

Most Reverend J. Terry Steib, S.V.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee
January 2009

⁷ *Vicesimus quintus annus*, Pope John Paul II

III. Only in God

Every desire of our hearts is rooted in our desire for God. Even when fulfilled, all other desires leave us wanting.

1. Can I name something that I thought I could not live without, only to be disappointed once I had acquired it?

2. When did I first realize that desire for God was at the core of all of my other desires in this life?

VII. God's Beloved

When we accept the truth of being God's beloved, our hearts swell with joyful response in love for God and for all of God's creation.

1. Life contains many "crosses." What does the cross of Christ mean to me in my daily life?

2. When did I last take up the cross of Christ and come to understand the companionship and faithfulness of God as I carried that cross. Can I say that, ultimately, there was joy in the mystery of the cross for me?

3. Who are the marginalized in my circle of life? What do I do on a regular basis to welcome the marginalized in my parish, at work and in my family?

