

Happiness Is – A synopsis of the Community Conference, June, 2019



We had such a wonderful conference two weekends ago, called “Happiness Is...” and I thought I would share some of what was said, especially for those who didn’t get the chance to go.

The conference was based on the idea of the four levels of happiness, and we heard a summary of the four levels, starting with the first, the satisfaction of our appetites.

Dr. John Patrick said that this could be considered “animal happiness,” and he showed us its limits, when he said, “it makes animals happy, but not human beings.” (His talks can be heard on his website: www.johnpatrick.ca)

Nevertheless, this first level of happiness is essential, and we heard Holly Howard speak about her experience in Connect Youth, of providing basic supports for young people who weren’t getting those supports from their families. Supports like food, clothing and even safe shelter are missing for many youths right in our area, which has led this church to partner with Connect youth.

The second level of happiness is about getting esteem from others and self-esteem. We heard Sarah White, a Christian psychotherapist, talk about men and women who try to build up their own self-worth and confidence.

This seems to promise happiness, but it often does not have a good outcome, and she told us why. But this level of happiness is also essential.

Yeleny Bello Marrero, our guest from Cuba, shared how their parish works with seniors and youth, establishing fellowship groups to help them build a good sense of themselves together.

The third level of happiness is the happiness of helping others.

Greg Best, a family lawyer, shared a well thought out talk about this and other aspects of happiness. He suggested how odd it is, on the surface, that “bringing joy to others is the best way to bring joy to ourselves.”

He suggested that it is because we are fundamentally social beings, and helping others is part of our nature.

Fr. Halbert, also our guest from Cuba, shared some of their parish’s efforts in this.

He said the worst thing in Cuba is that the need for survival brings out the worst in people, and that the greatest need is to see the neighbour as a brother, and not as an opportunity. He said their church helps people to develop a common humanity through its projects. “Our church,” he said, “addresses the social needs around us, but we do it for Jesus.”

The fourth level of happiness is where the spiritual dimension comes in, and St. Mary’s High School teacher Dave Bolger talked about this.

One of the things he talked about was “the illusion that choice makes you happy.” Often, he said, the more choice you have, the less happy you are.

There were many thought-provoking and inspiring things said during the conference. I want to go into a little more detail about two of them.

In Sarah White’s talk, she talked about people who come to her for counselling because they have sought self-esteem in their accomplishments and it has brought them to an unhappy state. Their purpose in their relationships has been to build their own sense of themselves, but they have not learned to serve the needs of others. They compare themselves a lot with others and this becomes very exhausting, as life becomes an endless competition.

The people she sees have reached a point where bitterness and apathy have taken over. They have to learn to build their goals in life over again, and that is very difficult for them. Seeking happiness in this way can be a problem for people of Christian faith, but our faith TEACHES this is not the way to find happiness.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus said this:

“I do not receive glory from people...How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” John 5:41, 44

So, although getting recognized by others is important, Jesus taught that it should never be our main source of happiness. Instead, as Sarah White said, we should learn to find our self-worth ***in our acceptance by God through Jesus.***

The second point I wanted to single out was raised by both Dave Bolger and Greg Best. Many people have the idea that happiness is simply natural and spontaneous. If it doesn't happen that way, it is artificial and not real happiness.

Studies have shown that this is not true. The happiness that comes from changing our behaviour and attitudes to suit our situation – making the best of it – is just as real and genuine as happiness that just “happens.”

Greg Best pointed out the important place of habits in this. Forming good habits is essential in achieving lasting happiness. If we believe that happiness must be “natural and spontaneous” then we are at the mercy of our moods and circumstances. But if we recognize that we have a part to play in making our own happiness, through our attitudes and habits, then we can always be working towards happiness, whatever our circumstances.

Fr. David gave the final talk and in this, he tried to make a bridge between the search for happiness and faith. What the four levels of happiness shows, is that there can't be true happiness without a divine, spiritual dimension.

But if a person were to come from a conference on happiness to a church service, he or she would find themselves in a different world. You see, the quest for happiness puts 'us' at the centre, however people of faith have found joy in seeing GOD is the centre.



The search for happiness starts from within ourselves and is measured by us.

God comes into the picture as what is beyond us, and a close, personal relationship to God is necessary for our happiness. For example, one of the awesome and beautiful characteristics of God in the Bible is his faithfulness – what the Old Testament calls *hesed*.

It's the characteristic of God being always being faithful to his promises, even if we have fallen short of what we owe. Growing steadily in knowing HIS faithfulness brings us to a deeper sense of well being. In the Bible, God is faithful to his covenant with Abraham through all the succeeding generations of Israel. **How truly rich and blessed is the one who is nourished by God's faithfulness.** And especially HE has made a new covenant with us, which we remember today in Holy Communion.

The hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" captures this biblical characteristic of God. But we cannot know anything about God's faithfulness unless we know by faith that he has made promises, made covenants, made commitments to his people. By faith we know God as the ultimate source of happiness, but we know him as much more than that.

We know God as he is seeking us, to bring us into fellowship with him. We know God as he has made promises, given laws, and finally given his only Son, out of his love for the world. So for people of faith, the centre of things is no longer ourselves and our happiness, but God. Nevertheless, it is well worth our time and effort to think about happiness. And our conference was a blessing in helping us do just that. To close, can I leave you with this guiding verse: O taste and see that the Lord is good, happy are they who trust in Him. AMEN.

