

The Gracehoper was always Jigging a jog

Sr Mary Luke CHC

'The gracehoper was always jigging a jog, hoppy, on akkant of his joyicity.'¹ I love these words by the master wordsmith, James Joyce. They conjure up a picture of someone so full of joy that it is expressed in the body, visibly. What was the cause, though, of the joyicity? The grasshopper is a GRACE HOPER. As it is written in the prayer of general thanksgiving, we give thanks for 'the means of grace and the hope of glory'. The means of grace: the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist which is the means of salvation; sacramentals, holy water, Scripture: these are all instigators of joy. Everything is from God and will go to God—it is all in his hands.

We have hope of glory. 'For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.'² The WEIGHT of glory—it is not a light thing, easily gained, easily lost. It has substance and it is the same glory that God gave his Son. 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them that they may be one, even as we are one ... that the world may know that thou hast sent me.'³ Many years ago Fr Andrew of the Society of the Divine Compassion said that 'The Gospel of Joy preached by happy lives is the best way of evangelising the world.' Joy and Glory are interwoven; not the joy that the world gives but that which Jesus gives which is not incompatible with suffering. 'You will weep and lament; your sorrow will be turned into joy ... I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.'⁴ In *The Sign of Jonas*, Thomas Merton prayed: 'Let me rest in you and be silent. Then the light of your joy will warm my life. Its fire will burn in my heart and shine for your glory. This is what I live for. Amen, Amen. Joy is to be shared.'⁵

Joy and peace are linked. If we have the peace that Christ gives, not the peace the world gives, there must be joy. Again, peace is not incompatible with struggle. 'Seek peace and pursue it,' says Psalm 34. Peace has to be MADE. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Children of God, or to put it another way: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be filled with joy, because being a child of God is what we all hope to realise. We are already children of God but we have to realise it. It is possible to hold it in a notional way, with the head rather

than the heart.

The cause of our joy is the resurrection. Do we allow the enormity of grace, of the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ to penetrate our lives, changing them and having visible effects?

As we approach Advent and Christmas in a year which has been so difficult because of Covid19, can we be full of joy and hope, not necessarily jigging a jog—probably not many of us are capable of that—but full of joyicity? If we radiate joy, hope and peace and are known to be Christians we cannot help but lead others to the source of our joy. As Merton wrote in ‘The Street Is for Celebration’:

When we celebrate, when we make our lives beautiful, when we give one another joy by loving, by sharing, then we manifest a power they cannot touch. We can be artisans of a joy they never imagined.⁶

With that comes the hope of glory which is made known through the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Glory to God in the highest and joy, hope and peace on earth to those of goodwill.

Notes

1. The opening line from ‘The Ondt and the Gracehoper’, James Joyce’s retelling of Aesop’s fable, ‘The Ant and the Grass Hopper’. It is included in Part III of *Finnegan’s Wake*.
2. 2 Corinthians 4:17
3. John 22:23
4. John 16:20, 22
5. *The Sign of Jonas*, from entry for November 16, 1947
6. from ‘The Street Is for Celebration’, included in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*.

Sr Mary Luke is a member of the Community of the Holy Cross, a Benedictine congregation in the Anglican church. The community is based in Costock, Nottinghamshire. Formerly Mother Superior, Sr Mary Luke’s community was founded in 1857 by Elizabeth Neale, sister of John Mason Neale, the hymnographer and translator of hymns from the early church. Members of the community have long engaged with the work of Merton, including correspondence during his lifetime (for details see The Merton Journal, Eastertide 2017, vol. 24:1). Sr Mary Luke, also a Patron, was able to join the TMS-GBI for its centenary celebrations in London, assisting us with the singing of the Salve Regina at the end of the service held at the Catholic Church of Notre Dame de France in Soho, London.