

12-25-16 **Resisting Happiness:** For centuries now, for people of all faiths or no faith at all, Christmas has been a season of good-will and good cheer, of giving and receiving, a time for reconnecting to the most important things of life. Scripture unveils Christmas with a joyful noise of uplifted voices, trumpets, and songs of praise. It is a hymn of victory to God for all of his marvelous deeds culminating in his coming among us as a newborn babe. St. Augustine, a bishop of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, writes: “I tell you again, for your sake God became man. You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time... You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for his mercy... You would have perished, had he not come.” This is the essence of Christian joy on this holy night: not eternal death but eternal life, not everlasting unhappiness but a true and everlasting happiness that begins even now. This is the Christmas message I want to focus on and I’ll begin with a couple questions.

Are you happy? I don’t mean in this present moment. I am talking about yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Will you be happy tomorrow? Let me explain. The desire for God is written upon each human heart. We are made by and for him. Happiness is therefore found when God is at the center of our life. Someone or something else will never fulfill our desire for true happiness; the best of people and the best of things will never fulfill our deepest longings. Only by placing God at the center of our thinking, attitudes, and behavior will bring true meaning, purpose, and happiness to our lives. The beauty of Christmas is that we do not have to go far to find happiness. God is not a distant or nebulous force, but now is made known to you in a very concrete and personal way. Now we know his face, now we can call upon his holy name – Jesus.

I have a Christmas present for you brought to you by the Knights of Columbus. It is a book written by Matthew Kelly and is entitled “Resisting Happiness.” It is a very easy read and is applicable to the everyday life of each one of us. If you begin to seriously read this book, I guarantee that you will not put it down and it will bring tremendous blessings to your life.

The premise is this: We are all made for happiness. And I suspect most of us are relatively happy most of time, but deep down we know we could be happier. Trouble is people will never live-up to our expectations, the next new shiny object will quickly fade away, and most importantly we can become our own worst enemy by resisting our own happiness. From the book: “What is resistance? It’s that sluggish feeling of not wanting to do something you know is good for you. It’s the inclination to do something that you unabashedly know is not good for you. It’s the desire and tendency to delay something you should be doing right now. It is resistance that stands between you and happiness. In these pages you will learn not only what it is, but how to recognize and conquer it in your own life.”

Overcoming resistance to our own happiness is one of the most essential lessons we can learn in life. As Kelly explains, it is really the difference between a pilgrim and a tourist. A pilgrim on a journey keeps his goal before him. A tourist, on the other hand, simply moves from one experience to another. When things don’t work out the way he imagines, the tourist gets upset and starts making demands. He makes life miserable for himself and the people around him. A tourist is anxious and agitated; a pilgrim is humble and patient. Such patience comes with a cost as it brings with it self-denial and delayed gratification. The ability to delay gratification enables a person to obtain substantial happiness. It also brings positive results to your finances and in your child rearing, marriage, personal goals and careers. Most importantly, it puts your whole life in true and proper perspective as a life-long journey to God – the source of all happiness. You can read about it in Matthew Kelly’s book – “Resisting Happiness.”

Christmas has been celebrated for over two millennia. It’s a story that has been re-told many times because it is good, beautiful, and true. It is retold each year because your life is part of the on-going story. Every human being of every generation search for meaning, purpose, and happiness in their lives. Each one of us encounter troubles and difficulties along the way. Some people find downright misery in their lives. “The most dangerous misery of all,” says Pope Francis, “is separation from God and the presumption of thinking we can do without him.” When God becomes the center of a person’s life new horizons of startling beauty

and inner dynamism open up for us – new horizons characterized by meaning, purpose, and God-centered happiness yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Merry Christmas and blessed New Year to one and all.