

Have you ever noticed that you can tell when someone is joyful? When they walk there is usually a spring in their step. They are upbeat and on the move a bit more swiftly than normal. And, most likely, that step is in rhythm with the song they are singing to themselves.

Perhaps you've seen someone joyfully walking down the shopping aisle at the grocery store. They are practically dancing and, if you listen, you might hear them quietly singing or humming a song.

Or, perhaps, you've looked at people in another car as you drive by or stop at a red light. The frustrated ones are usually yelling and pounding on the steering wheel starting and stopping with a screech of the tires and a string of obscenities silenced only by the windows. Yet you usually see the joyful ones bopping their head around and, most often, you can see their mouths moving and you know they are singing. It's really fun if you happen to be listening to the same radio station as they are and you can watch them sing what you are hearing. And it's the most fun when they glance over and suddenly stop because they realize that you've just been watching them channeling their inner rock star.

Think about Christmas time. And I am certain that none of us can claim that we don't do this. We inevitably start humming all the Christmas carols. We meander through the malls, we stroll through the stores, we cruise in our cars all the while humming *Joy to the world*, *Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer*, *I'm dreaming of a white Christmas*, and so on.

Children are a prime example. As they are usually filled with so much joy they are usually the ones singing all the time. Avery and Aidan will make Liz and I stop the TV to listen to their performances of song and dance. In all of this you don't even need those iPod headphones implanted in your ears. Often times whenever we are joyous we sing songs with only the silent accompaniment that plays in our heads. Our minds recall songs. Our minds remember the words. That then translates automatically to our mouths and our bodies. The songs flow from within and our overall demeanor can't help but reflect what we are singing in our hearts.

Today, we heard in our Epistle lesson St. Paul's exhortation from Ephesians chapter 5. Therein, he writes, *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."*

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Well, St. Paul says in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit, in other words the one who is filled with the Spirit, is one who has kindness and goodness, meekness and gentleness, faith and love, is forgiving and patient, has peace and is joyous. Now the question comes- "how do we fill ourselves with that?" Our sinful flesh inevitably drives us to fill ourselves with hatred and division, with frustration and anger, with self-conceitedness and self-concern. So how do we then cultivate Spiritual fruit? How do we feed ourselves in such a way that these good things flow out instead of the bad?

The answer lies in that which supports the filling of ourselves - the source, if you will. The reason St. Paul says, "Don't be drunk with wine" is not to forbid drinking but is to express that well known truth. When

we drink too much our inhibitions normally fall away, our tongues are loosened, and we don't watch our behavior as well. In other words, filling ourselves with too much drink puts us in a position where we follow our fleshly desires instead of exercising spiritual discipline.

The same is true in the opposite. And that is what St. Paul alludes to in the words following. It's as though he answers our question in advance knowing that we will ask it. He says basically, "If you want to be filled with the Spirit, if you want to do that which supports a spiritual life of goodness and kindness, love and faith, etc then here is what you do.... *"speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

I think you can now understand why I began my sermon talking about those who sing to themselves. St. Paul is not just talking about singing and speaking to one another as in an uplifting fashion. It's not just about offering a word of encouragement to another or expressing God's love to another. Indeed, that is good and we are called to do so. But before we even get to that point we must understand that to uplift another you must be uplifted yourself. To express joy to another you must be joyous yourself. To fill another you must be filled.

St. Paul is talking about that inner dialog you have with yourself. You need to put yourself in the right frame of mind and be joyful within yourself. And the way to do it is to sing songs to yourself, to repeat to yourselves Psalms and passages of God's word, to recognize and give thanks to God for all His benefits. Doing this fills you with a sense of God's goodness, with a sense of God's sovereignty and love for you. Furthermore, it shapes who you are and the way you think. It thwarts those ever urging desires to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. It enables you to face bad times with the sure knowledge that the Lord is on your side. It enables you to lift your heart in sadness with the sure hope God provides. It enables you to set aside divisions and discord with the sure truth that God is sovereign over all the earth. It enables you to set aside your guilt and failures and to know that it has been nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ.

Now I'll admit that it is not as easy as it sounds. We are a people on the move. We are a people who must multi-task. We divide our attention between several different things. And I think, and I'm sure statistics would show it to be true, that the more we fill our lives up with everything else we deal with... the more we empty our spiritual tank. And the more we empty our spiritual tank the less we are able to keep our confidence in God, the less we are able to help others, the less we are able to see past ourselves, the less we show goodness and mercy, the less we express grace and faith. And I would dare say, and I think Fr. Josh even expressed this last week in a different way, the more we pursue to fill ourselves with these worldly things and to seek to fill ourselves with the wrong things - the less satisfied and joyous we are in all areas of life!!

So today, I want to do something that I normally don't do. I want to issue a challenge to us all. It's a simple challenge and it won't really require much work. But it will require us to follow St. Paul's advice. I want you (and I'll take the challenge as well) to *increase* the number of times you speak to yourself in

hymns, psalms and scriptural verses. What that means is this. If you don't do any of that already then I want you to take one step in that direction and try and start each day that way. If you do already start your day that way then I want you to take another step and end your day that way. If you already do that then take a brief moment during the middle of the day to do the same.

You see, the Church was already aware of the impact that this could have in one's life. They had seven different hours for prayer throughout the day. However, for practical reasons of the laity they reduced it to Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. These are called Daily Offices and are really meant to be said every single day. But yet, we don't even do that. And my challenge today isn't really to get you to that point. My challenge is for us to begin or to increase our spiritual fullness by speaking to ourselves in hymns, psalms and scriptural truths. It is to help us shape our perspective, to strengthen our souls, and to renew our minds as we go out and live our lives in a world devoid of faith. It is to fill us with the ultimate desire that we may then fill others.

Today you will find in your bulletin an insert. Actually, there are two copies of the same insert. And that is on purpose. On those inserts you'll find a few short verses from the book of Psalms. You'll also find a few hymns with which most of us are familiar. By no means is it a complete list and you are free to deviate from the list and pick other passages of scriptures and other hymns if you so choose.

But, I want you take them with you when you leave. Don't leave them in the pew or throw them away. Post them on your refrigerator. Put them on your bathroom mirror where you get ready in the morning. Put them in your car. Put them on your desk. Put them on your computer monitor at work or home. In other words, put them anywhere that will remind you to start the day or to take pause during the day or to end the day with one or more of them. If you know the hymn tune then sing it to yourself even if you don't know all the words. If you read a verse recite it quietly to yourself. If it draws your mind to something else then offer it to God in a quick prayer. If you feel the need for more than one verse then recite several of them or open your Bible or open your browser to the book of Psalms and read an entire one. After the first week, I want you to take pause with your family. The best time would be at dinner time or at bed time. Take just one more minute before you eat or sleep and do the same out loud as a family.

I really want us to do this as an entire congregation. And I will send this challenge to all those who are not with us today. The challenge is to do this for one month straight. While it doesn't sound too challenging, it will be. But commit yourself to it. Commit your family to it. Hold them accountable and ask them every day whether they remembered to sing unto God in their hearts. And at the end of this challenge, it is my prayer that you will find St. Paul's advice to be true and that you will be filled with all peace and joy in believing.

*"Speak to yourselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." AMEN*

**Psalm 9** – I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will speak of all thy marvelous works.

**Psalm 16** – Preserve me, O God; for in thee have I put my trust.

**Psalm 19** – Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

**Psalm 23** – The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing.

**Psalm 24** - The earth is the Lord's and all that therein is.

**Psalm 25** – Show me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths.

**Psalm 26** – Thy loving-kindness is ever before mine eye; and I will walk in thy truth.

**Psalm 29** – Ascribe unto the Lord the honor due unto His Name

**Psalm 47** – O clap your hand together, all ye peoples, O sing unto God with the voice of melody.

**Psalm 56** – I have put my trust in God, and will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

**Psalm 63** – O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee.

**Psalm 95** – O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

**Psalm 100** – O be joyful in the Lord, all ye land; serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song.

**Psalm 119** – O stablish thy word in thy servant, that I may fear thee.

**Psalm 135** – For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.

**Psalm 145** – Every day will I give thanks unto thee; and praise thy Name for ever and ever.

**Ephesians 4:32** - *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

**Isaiah 54:10** - *For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken," Says the LORD who has compassion on you.*

**Philippians 4:12-13** - *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

**Romans 12:2** - *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

**2 Timothy 1:7** - *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

**Proverbs 16:3** - *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18** - *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

**Romans 8:37** - *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

**Romans 8:28** - *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

#### **SOME WELL-KNOWN HYMNS**

A Mighty Fortress is our God  
All hail the power of Jesus' name  
When I survey the wondrous cross  
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty  
Stand up, stand up, for Jesus  
When Peace like a River (It is well with my soul)

The Church's one foundation  
The God of Abraham praise  
At the name of Jesus  
Joyful, joyful we adore thee  
Jesus Christ is risen today  
How wondrous and great thy works, God of praise!