

The man went to his rabbi to complain: "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?" The rabbi answered, "Take the goat into the room with you." The man was incredulous, but the rabbi insisted: "Do as you're told and come back in a week." A week later the man came back, half dead. "We can't stand it. The goat is noisy and filthy." The rabbi said: Go home now and let the goat out, and come back in a week." It was one radiant man who returned seven days later. "Life is beautiful, rabbi," he beamed. We enjoy every minute. No goat, only the nine of us." (George Mikwes)

A silly story ... with a point. A huge part of contentment and joy is your attitude. You can have everything going for you, and still be nervous and dejected. You can have, humanly –speaking, not a lot and be joyful.

It's exactly for that reason that the first readings today seems to advise us to measure our joy quotient, and make any necessary interventions. The commands from Zephaniah and St. Paul are: "Shout for joy. Sing Joyfully. Be glad. Exult with all your heart. Rejoice in the Lord; I shall say it again: rejoice!"

I asked parishioners two questions. First, if God wants us to be joyful ... and the world needs joyful witnesses ... and it's more healthy to be joyful ... what things should you avoid. Great answers. If you want to be joyful, don't make things too complicated, don't let anger take over, don't play the "What if" game ("What if this or what if that"), don't dwell on the one thing that didn't go right (the lost key, the spilt coffee, a cranky companion) and ignore all the things that were, don't react too quickly and feel bad afterwards.

And ... what can you do positively, if you want to be more joyful. Listen to music, dance around the house, go to the beach, go to Arroyo Seco, watch Mash re-runs, hit a bucket of golf balls, take a brisk walk, finish an old project, dress up (with a lot of jewelry, a dress or skirt, the special cross someone gave you, lots of blue, formal black, everything must match – especially shoes and purse), get your hair done. Other pepper-uppers, if you want to be joyful: call you children away from home, spend time with a friend, physical activity, nature, play with children, take a mini-nap, talk someone else out of their sorrow. Above all ... and really most common : pray, praise God, commune with God.

Anything mentioned above, even the most secular, is a true spiritual exercise if it makes you more joyful. Everyone gets dinged by life, sometimes dinged really good, to the point where our body is broken, or our heart or spirit. We're allowed sorrow and grieving ... to pass through. But as a life-style, Christians are told to be joyful.

If one of your friends starts going around living it up, living the high life, spending money in all directions because he just knows he's going to win the lottery, you might caution: Hold on. Wait up a little. Win the lottery first; then start living it up. But with us it's different. We don't know how; we don't know when --- but we're 100% certain Jesus is coming again, we know we are saved, we know 100% we'll win the lottery. So ... even if we can't think of a single thing in our past to celebrate ... we really are supposed to start celebrating our future right now --- in fact, God wants us to!