

## 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**What makes you happy? Is it food? Is it achieving your dream? Is it helping other people? Is it being at prayer? All those things can make you happy.**

**Earlier this month the priests of our diocese spent a few days together for our annual continuing education, and we learned about the Four Levels of Happiness through a speaker from the Spitzer Center. The first level is immediate gratification: It includes food and drink, and it aims for pleasure just for oneself. The second level is personal achievement: It includes self-promotion and obtaining personal power and control. The third level is good beyond self: It includes loving others, promoting justice and building community. The fourth level is ultimate good: It is based on the principles of truth, love, justice and beauty. True happiness will come when we break through the self-centered lure of levels one and two and move into the more charitable levels three and four. Instead of simply wanting a favorable comparison with someone else, we desire to contribute to that person's good. Instead of looking for the bad traits of other people, we look for what is good in them. Instead of being free from commitments, we make ourselves free for the sake of others. At one time or another, we've all learned that some happiness outranks other happiness, that choosing selfish pleasures does not satisfy as much as pleasing others.**

**When you consider that the lowest level of happiness has to do with favorite foods and drinks, whether it's pizza or steak, soft drinks or beer, it's a little surprising to find in today's first reading this promise that Isaiah the prophet delivered to his people gathered on the slope of the city of Jerusalem: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." It sounds for all the world like level one happiness. Even the parable in the gospel pitches a view of the kingdom of heaven as a banquet.**

**Well, perhaps Isaiah knew that the way to our heart is through our stomach. Even in our ordinary relationships with other people, we frequently develop our friendship and deepen our love over a meal. People entice us through the natural pleasures of food, which soften our heart to make commitments back to them. Even dogs learn to sit and stand on command when they realize their behavior will lead to a treat.**

**Of course, some people can raise the preparation of food to an art. When a really good chef has created something extraordinary, and when you can taste the difference, you may have moved from a level one happiness to a level four happiness, as you encounter just how beautiful the world can be. Within the arts we come to a happiness deeper than selfish pleasures.**

**So Isaiah's vision is welcome news for those who struggle every day. At times we cannot find happiness. At times even the things that usually bring us happiness don't. But the recipe for happiness is more in giving than in receiving. The rich food and drink we receive in life is a sign of God's happiness with us. When we're enjoying level one, God is enjoying level three. God's generosity then inspires us to share with others the blessings we have received. That will make us happy.**

Sunday, October 15, 2017