

Daniel Bishop & Melissa Palmer

A few days ago David Brooks had an editorial on the difference between happiness and joy. I don't know if you had a chance to see it. He reflected on the occasion of a university graduation, where graduates feel happiness because of what they have accomplished, and families in attendance feel joy because of the happiness they see in the graduates. He wrote, "Happiness usually involves a victory for the self. Joy tends to involve the transcendence of self."

I'd like to apply this to Daniel and Melissa because the two of you may experience both emotions today. You are happy that your wedding day has finally come, but you probably experience your deepest joy not when you are accomplishing a personal goal, but when you see happiness in your partner. Marriage offers opportunities both for personal happiness and for transcendent joy, which is far more rewarding.

Both of you have worked in the field of health care - in pharmacy and counseling. You have tried every day to help other people feel happy about their lives. Something has gone wrong with the people you serve - physically, mentally or emotionally. It may have been their own fault or not. But you are there to help them on a path to a healthier life. You derive satisfaction out of this work, and you experience joy when you see improvements in someone else's life.

St. Paul wrote about human feelings and character traits in the passage we heard as the second reading today. Paul writes to a people who have developed many good qualities: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness. He compares these to layers of clothing you put on before going out to face the day. All these spiritual garments prepare you to meet people in the world. But there's one more garment, more important than the rest. "Over all these," St. Paul writes, "put on love, that is, the bond of perfection." Love is something more than kindness, more than forgiveness. Love does not pursue personal pleasure and happiness, though it does accomplish that; love can ultimately bring joy when it drives our desire for the happiness of another. Married couples possess a unique position to experience that blend of love and joy.

Incidentally, Paul wrote this letter from prison. At the time, he was not on the receiving end of much human love. But even without receiving it, he was able to give it, and that made him healthy and whole. He gave love because he had received love in Christ.

Daniel and Melissa, we experience joy today as we witness your happiness, and we look to you to show us even more all that joy can be. You will do that when you share with others the love you have for each other. That will bring joy to the world.

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