

**2012 Diocesan Youth Conference
Carlinville, Illinois**

**The Third Sunday of Easter – Year B
March 11, 2012**

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My dear young friends,

You have spent your time together reflecting on the direction of Saint Paul to “rejoice in the Lord, always” (Philippians 4:4). At first thought this might seem a strange passage to focus on during Lent, this season of self-denial and penance for our sins. But if we are to rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS, that means even during Lent and difficult times!

As you know, these forty days are given to us so that might reflect more seriously and prayerfully on the Ten Commandments. Too often we think of the Ten Commandments as placing restrictions on our freedom. As such, we do not usually rejoice at being given a command, either from a fellow human or from God.

We think this way because we are tempted to see God as a rival to us, as one who wants to limit us and take away our happiness. But if we viewed the Ten Commandments properly and

recognized that God is not a rival by a Father and friend, we would see that the Ten Commandments “are not a series of ‘no’s’ but a great ‘yes’ to love and to life.”¹ If we looked in this way, we would see that they are the only way to lasting happiness.

Let us look at an analogy to help us understand what this means. Every relationship has ground rules. Say you have a friend named Tim who asks you not to call him Timmy. By asking you not to call him Timmy, Tim has established a rule for your relationship. His rule is not a way of refusing your friendship, but of accepting. If you want to keep him as a friend, you will abide by his rule; but if you damage your relationship with him or even hurt, you’ll call him Timmy despite his wishes.

The Ten Commandments can be seen in a similar light. God has given us the Ten Commandments to establish a relationship with us. If you want to keep your relationship with God intact, you will abide by the Ten Commandments and seek to honor them in our daily life. But if you want to break your relationship with God, then you will live your lives outside of the Ten Commandments and reject his friendship.

The Ten Commandments are a great “yes” to both love and life because of the promise attached to the Fourth Commandment: “that you may have long life in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). This same promise surely belongs also with each of the other Commandments of the Lord; if we follow them we will have a long life, which is another way of speaking of a soul that is refreshed, as the Psalmist sings today (cf. Psalm 19:8). For this reason, the Psalmist also sings, “the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart” (Psalm 19:9). If we follow the Ten Commandments, we can certainly rejoice in the Lord, always, because his friendship will also be with us.

Knowing our tendency to lose sight of the goal of our lives, the Lord Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments, saying, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:-37-39).

We know that living in such a way, that loving God and our neighbor every moment of the day, is not easy. We know that it requires us to take up our cross each day and follow after Jesus

and that we remain close to the Eucharist. When many of his disciples left him because his teachings were difficult, Jesus turned to the Apostles and asked them, “Do you also want to leave” (John 6:67)? On behalf of the Twelve, Peter answered with the words we used as the antiphon of today’s Psalm: “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life” (John 6:68).

There are many people today who tell you to stop following Jesus if you want to be happy. They point to any number of places, things, and ways that they say will make you happy. But each of those so-called sources of happiness requires you to reject one of the Ten Commandments. Such people promise a fading, momentary happiness by taking you away from a lasting happiness; what they promise you is a false joy.

True joy, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, reminds us, is not of diversions; true joy cannot be found by setting responsibility aside or by ignoring the commitments and duties of one’s life.

True joy is linked to something deeper. Of course, in the all too often frenetic pace of daily life it is important to find time for rest and relaxation, but true joy is linked to our relationship with God. Those who have encountered Christ in

their own lives feel a serenity and joy in their hearts that no one and no situation can take from them. St. Augustine understood this very well; in his quest for truth, peace and joy, after seeking them in vain and in many things he concluded with his famous words: “and our heart is restless until it rests in God” (cf. *Confessions*, I, 1, 1).

True joy is not merely a passing state of mind or something that can be achieved with the person’s own effort; rather it is a gift, born from the encounter with the living Person of Jesus and, making room within ourselves, from welcoming the Holy Spirit who guides our lives.²

The word “rejoice” comes from an Old French word meaning, “to be full of joy.” If we allow the Holy Spirit to take up his home within us, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit and, hence, filled also with joy. If we live our lives always open to God’s grace, we can truly rejoice in the Lord, always.

If we turn briefly to today’s Gospel, we are told zeal for God’s house consumed the Lord as he overturned the tables and chased out the moneychangers (cf. John 2:17). We don’t use the word zeal very much these days, but it means a fervent or enthusiastic

devotion. Would that each of us were so consumed with zeal for God's house! By virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, each of us has been a temple of the Holy Spirit. How fervent or enthusiastic is our devotion in keeping our souls a fitting dwelling place for God?

In these remaining days of Lent, let each of us strive to keep the Ten Commandments out of friendship for God, that he may find in us a worthy home and cause us to rejoice in him, always and everywhere.

May God give us this grace.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *An Invitation to Faith*.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus* Address, December 11, 2011.