



# Happiness

In the middle of my winter I found an invincible summer. *Daniel O'Leary*

"Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart" *Jeremiah 15:16*



Kwang Mathurosemontri, unsplash.com

## Questions

- Can you recall a moment of happiness? Or remember seeing one?
- To what degree can I determine my happiness, and when it comes along do I enjoy it freely and fully?

## Additional reading material (poems):

*Happiness* by Jane Kenyon in *Otherwise: New and Selected poems*

*A brief for the defense\**, Jack Gilbert in *Refusing Heaven*

*So Much Happiness*, Naomi Shihab Nye

*Essential ecstasy*, pp 170-172 in *The divine dance*, Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell.

## There will be music despite everything\*

Happiness may be a subject of which we are wary. It may seem like a trite word, suggest shallowness. Life is serious and we want to be taken seriously. We recognise the fleeting nature of happiness, suddenly appearing then disappearing, like a wind that is felt strongly then drops. It is airy and seemingly cannot be controlled or managed, is indifferent to merit or effort even. 'There's just no accounting for happiness/or the way it turns like a prodigal.' writes Jane Kenyon in *Happiness*.

In poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama's book *In the shelter* he shares that 'Religion had rarely been something that gave me hope for happiness.' Discuss! Holiness, passion, guilt these may be the currency that we have at some point been more familiar, even at ease, with. Most of us have a handle on sadness or sorrow but do we have a theology of joy, muses Ó Tuama? What is happening now that I need to welcome? he asks. Might that include happiness? Why might we exclude it?

Jack Gilbert boldly and sympathetically asserts that in the face of global and local horrors we must also risk delight. 'We must have/the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless/furnace of this world.' There are many reasons why we might feel we cannot or should not be happy. Is all only injustice?

It pulls me up a little to read the message of the impending arrival of the Son of God delivered as 'you will have joy and gladness' and 'many will rejoice at his birth'. The man of sorrows was also the man who did not walk about with a peg over his nose or give the impression that he couldn't wait to get out of there. This 'glutton', this 'wine brawler', who cried with others' pain and railed against stubbornness and intransigence. Amongst the gallery of images of Christ we must have, we need, a happy Jesus.

*You know why it is hard to be happy? Its because we refuse to let go of what makes us sad. Anon*

'Decide to be happy' invites priest Daniel O'Leary. The desert fathers and mothers had a term, 'acedia', the refusal of joy. Regarded as one of the deadly sins. It and O'Leary ask me what my energies and choices are turned towards. Do they include happiness?

Read Pádraig Ó Tuama's *In the shelter*, pp 23-29

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