

# *My Father's House*

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## **Being Catholic in a Post Christian Nation** *Recovering the Spirit of Joy*

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### **Do Not Conform**

St. Paul admonishes us "present yourselves as a living sacrifice. This is your acceptable worship. Do not be conformed to the thought patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Thus you will be able to discern God's will, what is good, acceptable and perfect" (*Rom 12:1-2*). St. Paul realized a simple truth - that Christians are called to live in a pagan environment. He went on to say, "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature." The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (*Gal 5:16-23*).

### **Recapturing the Joy**

So many millions of Americans are suffering from clinical depression. From those facing possible bleak years in a nursing home, to high school students; from the elderly to young married couples. We consume billions of dollars on over-the-counter and under-the-counter drugs striving to ward off chemically the emptiness and lack of spirit in our own hearts. We live in the most comfortable time in the history of mankind. Yet most Americans do not experience that love, joy and peace that God promises. Our American culture, for all of its emptiness on entertainment, good times, excitement and pleasure is producing more than its abundance of neurotically unhappy people. We have lost the joy of life and that peace of soul that only Christ can give us. Some years ago, both Billy Graham and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen wrote a book on peace of soul.

### **Our Culture Is Killing Our Souls**

What is it about our culture that is killing our souls? Some say it's the pagan mindset of most Americans, the hedonistic philosophy of television, the decline of religious faith, and the worship of self. "Many believe that the electronic environment is out of control in our society. It is hard to escape the constant blabbering of television, not only in homes, but in stores, waiting rooms, airports, now even post offices. Television has become the babysitter of people of all ages, and not a kind or cheerful one. Speaking unceasingly about murder and mayhem, earthquakes and killer tornadoes, bombing campaigns, and wars." (Mary Meehan, *Recapturing the Joy of Life. the Human Life Reviewed*, NYC Summer '02, pg. 28).

### **Radio**

Radio with its loud, violent music, its mindless commercials, and its arrogant announcers is emptying our souls of stability, joy and peace of mind.

### **Telephones**

Telephones are everywhere. We now carry them with us at every moment. Our beepers go off in the middle of church services. And most of our talk, like most of our media, is surface talk without any depth or real meaning. Tasteless films are also killing our souls by pushing the violent and the pornographic or the merely stupid and vulgar. In the media world of today, nothing is sacred.

### **Computers**

The word processing capability of computers in on the one hand a great aid to writers, lawyers and secretaries, yet even these are a mixed blessing. The Internet is a major purveyor of pornography and violence. It passes on much misinformation and false ideals. It is also harming our teenage children and preteens, as well. It teaches our children to say, "Gimme!" and more. It pushes parents to run faster on the treadmill, to make more money to buy more things.

### **Our Suburbia**

Architect, Sarah Susanka, sums up suburbia in this way, "So many houses, so big with so little soul." She described a venture into contemporary suburbia where she felt "as though I were driving through a collection of massive storage containers for people" (*The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live*, Newton, Conn.: Tauton Press, 1998, 7 & 9). Fr. Thomas Stack, who taught me at St. Thomas Seminary, used to quote T.S. Eliot on the emptiness of suburbia.

### **Our Dreary Culture**

People in our culture have so given their souls over to materialism, hedonism, and rugged individualism that they have become 'dumbed down', they have lost their creativity, their imagination, their zest for life. But cultures are not frozen in stone. Although violence and immorality are taught, promoted and glamorized, they can be untaught, resisted, and deglamorized. Ted Flynn, in his new bestseller, *Idols in the House*, has said that our children are being abused and paganized at the most alarming rate in history. He calls our children an "endangered species".

### **Too Materialistic**

Some years ago in New Jersey, a sociological report asked 10,000 high school graduating seniors this question among others: "What is the number one thing you personally want to do with your life and education?" Shockingly, 89 percent of them, many of them graduating from Catholic schools said that their number one aim in life was to make a lot of money. How different from my growing up when my parents and grandparents told me, "If you don't like it, eat it anyway." If it's a hand-me-down, wear it with honor. If it's secondhand, make it do." Or even more often, "Learn to do without." Our Holy Father,

Pope John Paul II, when he came to Yankee Stadium years ago, said that the Lazarus' of our world are at our door. We were reminded that 80 percent of our brothers and sisters go to bed with less than one full meal. In addition to the Third World where people live in sub-human condition, there is a Fourth World where people literally live outside of the economic spectrum, never having a penny, a peso or a lira to their name. He said that American Christians must learn to give from their substance and not merely from their surplus and must return to a simpler way of life.

### **Chicken Soup for the Soul**

In a marvelous "Chicken Soup for the Soul" series of books, we are encouraged to spend more time with one another, to enjoy a walk in the woods, to plant a garden, read a good book, to participate in a choir, to help our neighbor, to get involved in social work, and to love one another. Jesus of the gospel tells us to love one another as I have loved you. We adults can show our children that real life is more interesting, joyful and exciting than the electronic, processed versions. Our young people should know that they do not have to accept the values of today's culture. They have got spirit to make a difference in the lives of others.

### **Our Professionals**

Our doctors can, once again, become people-centered rather than profit-minded and can be the custodians and the guardians of all life, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. What a scandal it is to realize that the American medical profession is on record for being for the destruction of 100 million innocent babies. Our lawyers can be encouraged to do more pro-bono work for the poor and disadvantaged. They can return to a deep respect for the laws of nature and the laws of nature's God - the foundation upon which our legal system was built. The most precedented quote in American jurisprudence was that of the Supreme Court that stated in 1892, "The laws and the institutions of this nation must necessarily be based upon and embody the life and teachings of the Redeemer of Mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise" (87 precedents).

### **Politicians and Educators**

Our politicians can learn once again from the words of George Washington that religion and morality are the twin pillars of America and that anyone who attacks these cannot possibly consider themselves to be a loyal patriot. Our college presidents can insist upon the spiritual and moral training of our students at that most vulnerable age of their lives. Thank God that the first 106 colleges in this country were all Christian with no co-ed dorms; and that Living by the Ten Commandments was taken for granted, along with prayer and Bible reading.

### **The Stakes Are High**

With so many millions of Americans living in depression, the answer is all too obvious. It is the Spirit of God that produces love, joy and peace. True love, real peace of soul and authentic joy are given abundantly to those who follow the Lord.

### **The Role of the Churches**

Most social work in this country is still being done by the churches and synagogues. In fact, the Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of healthcare and education in the United States. Grandmothers and grandfathers should not move to Florida away from their families. Both their children and especially their grandchildren need their warmth and wisdom. High school students and college students should all be involved in some type of social action. In this way, both the senior citizens and young adults would recapture the joy of a loving presence. It is love that makes the world go 'round. Our hearts are made for love. A heart full of love is a heart full of joy, because a heart full of love is a heart full of God.

### **Which Way America?**

The question of the hour for our professionals and teachers, for our senior citizens and our students, for our clergy and our laity is which way do we go? Will we continue to be a depressed society that has lost its soul, or will we beg the spirit of the living God to come and fill our minds and hearts with those fruits of the Spirit that God promised. For the fruit of the Spirit is above all love, joy and peace.

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