

## Happiness and Faith

I was reading yesterday about the report of a recent study showing that people who follow a religion through active participation in congregations tend to be happier. There have been other reports in the past with similar conclusions. And of course as people of faith we would hope this to be the case.

To quote the item I read: "According to the results, religiously active people are typically happier and more 'civically engaged' – meaning they are more likely to do things such as vote in elections or join community groups – than adults who either do not practise a religion or do not actively participate in one. Additionally, the study also found that involvement in religious congregations coincides with some healthier lifestyle choices, with religious people reportedly smoking and drinking less than those without a faith."

That is of course not to claim that people who are not part of a faith community cannot be fulfilled or active in society. Clearly they can. And yet faith gives an additional motivation and perspective on life.

That is well expressed in the Bible passage we just heard from the letter of James (James 5.13-16). Life can be very difficult at times. Illness may afflict us. We may be burdened by what we have done wrong or have failed to do. Yet in each case we can be helped by the prayer and support of the Christian community. Above all we can be sustained by the love, compassion and forgiveness of God.

The same applies to how we view the world in which we live: a world in which there is much good, but also much that is bad: violence, fear, exploitation, oppression, abuse. Faith reminds us not to give in to despair, resignation, or, arguably worse, indifference. Instead it gives us hope and a desire to contribute even in small ways to the common good. For in that we are called to follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Experiencing happiness can be a desperate challenge where there is an absence of peace and reconciliation. Conversely the achievement of peace and reconciliation opens the way to true happiness and human fulfilment, to a better world for all. For that we continue to pray and to sing songs of praise to God.

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