

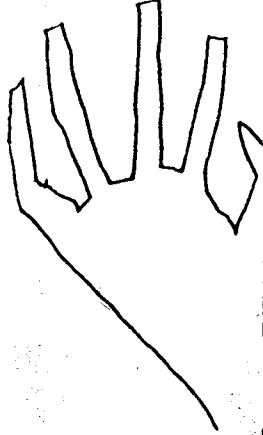
Often in Spred, we hear the phrase, “When we are happy to be together, Jesus is with us.” Originally a saying of Fr. Jean Mesny of Lyons, France, the phrase has been picked up and used in many Spred communities of faith. There is a spontaneous affection for this image of being happy in the presence of Jesus. When we look a bit closer, we see that the phrase can have several levels of meaning - like a shining stone with many facets.

One aspect of the phrase, “When we are happy to be together, Jesus is with us,” involves the elements that go into being happy. Happiness exists along a continuum. There is a way of being less happy and more happy. Fifty percent of our happiness depends on our genetic make up and about ten percent comes from the circumstances in which we find ourselves. So that leaves about forty percent for intentional happiness. 1 Intentional happiness is the way we choose to be and to act in our own world in the present moment. We can choose to make ourselves miserable and we can allow ourselves to become happy.

One way we can become happy is to allow ourselves to “go with the flow”. Flow experiences involve intense absorption in the present moment. 2 The activity that brings us into a state of flow cannot be too easy or we get bored. It cannot be too difficult or we get anxious and discouraged. We need an activity that is mid-way between boring and scary and then we can hit our stride and enter totally into the experience. Time flies by. At the end of the experience, we are content, we are happy. “The good life, a happy life is characterized by flow.” 3

Being able to enjoy flow brings us pleasure and so we want to repeat the experience. It leads us to being involved in life in the present moment. Those of us who have had satisfying experiences with various materials during the preparation phase of a total community session in Spred know what flow is. And to our amazement, we can see that even the person who is most challenged with disabilities can enter into the flow experience. When their activity is right for them, i.e. does not cause anxiety or boredom, they can jump right in.

Another element in building our own world of happiness is the ability to savor life’s joys. We do not need to postpone happiness. We can do it in the present moment with the right frame of mind. Savoring implies prolonging enjoyment. We can enjoy today what happened yesterday. The ability to hang on to good feelings seems to be a gift given to many of our friends with disabilities. We might be prone to pick away at a situation and



they can be there in the same space, beaming. They become for us a call to conversion!

This passage into happiness goes with the Easter season. In the story of the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24: 13), we see the two disciples walking along the road. Jesus passes by and they don't even see him. They were "downcast". They are in a black hole of sadness. Then Jesus engages them in conversation and their sadness begins to lift. They invite Jesus to stay with them.

So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened. (Luke 24: 31)

Only now do they recognize him and then they said to each other, "were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way." They then returned to Jerusalem to tell the others what had happened along the way and how he was made known in the breaking of the bread.

They had passed from gloom to great rejoicing, filled with gratitude. Gratitude is involved in savoring joy because it means that nothing is taken for granted. Gratitude is a "felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation." 4 Gratitude is also the basic meaning of the word Eucharist - to give thanks. At the Spred family liturgies, we are gathered together to give thanks and we recognize him in the breaking of the bread. This is the summit of "When we are happy to be together, Jesus is with us."

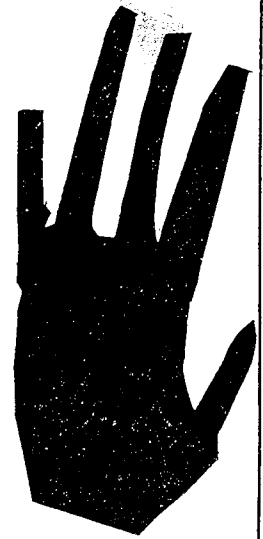
In our day to day life, the mystery of the Eucharist is still with us. "God's grace, that is his saving real presence, is not a special realm of inwardness, but the whole of reality in which we live." 5 This grace of God, the presence of Jesus with us liberates us from alienation and brings us reconciliation, it saves us. We need help to be happy. Being happy together is often a gift of grace. On the one hand we receive support from others and on the other hand we give support to others. For this, grace, like the wind, pushes us onward.

"Being for others is a way of life, born of grace which provides a real possibility for a very personal encounter with God who is experienced as the source of all happiness." 6

Those who volunteer to be catechists in Spred put themselves in an excellent position to cultivate that happiness that discloses the mystery of Jesus who is with us. To volunteer presence, time and energy comes from a heart of kindness. "If you want to be happy, practice compassion" says the Dalai Lama and a Hindu proverb says "True happiness consists in making others happy." 7

The acts of kindness that keep us together in a Spred community of faith do not need to be grandiose. The little signs of awareness and kindness builds up the community and produces profound effects.

Little by little, the community of faith nurtured by mutual support and kindness grows into a liturgical assembly. From the beginning of the church, the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus was linked to the coming together of Christians. To celebrate the Risen One, we come together. "The truth of the bond with him not only requires that we not ignore the presence of others but on the contrary, demands that we make our way through them." 8



**TO BE
TOGETHER**

The task of becoming an assembly of worship requires us to be happy to be together. This does not seem to work by just putting everyone together in a church. It requires a certain leadership and learning. Music is a wonderful way to learn to be happy to be together. When everyone can sing according to their capacity, we make a joyful noise to the Lord. Music allows space for the liturgy to unfold and it infolds all in its harmony.

As we build an assembly of worship, we are learning to be happy to be together and we are preparing the space for Jesus to be with us. Sometimes it is too difficult to accomplish this in the large assembly on Sundays so the Spred community of faith begins the work of becoming a liturgical assembly in its small community of faith. Then later in the larger community, everyone is ready to participate.

I am always impressed by the quality of liturgies when the assembly is made up of those who belong to small communities of faith. The assembly is like a well-watered garden. The members are not bored nor are they anxious. They are ready for a flow experience. They are concentrated and they are happy to be together.

One of the most important elements in helping the liturgical assembly to be happy to be together is the pace of the liturgy. If the liturgy is hurried, some people get lost. If the liturgies are measured in word and action, everyone can join in. The cumulative effect when all are participating with joyful hearts, is the awareness that Jesus is with us. Now we become the fundamental sacrament of the church.

We can simply juxtapose the two parts of the phrase,

When we are happy to be together - Jesus is with us.

We can also see that this is a way of talking about Jesus and ourselves at the same time. One is mediated by the other: when Jesus is with us, we are happy and when we are happy to be together we discover that Jesus is with us.

In the method *Vivre* used in Spred sessions, we always juxtapose elements of a catechesis. We let them breathe out there and those who receive the juxtaposition play with them according to their capacity. We know that those with certain learning limitations cannot handle cause and effect and in front of certain mysteries, we cannot do very well with cause and effect either. So we know that by being happy together, we cannot make Jesus be present. We just know that when we are happy to be together, Jesus is just with us. Like the disciples of Emmaus we hope that we will recognize Him.

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1 Sonja Lyubomirsky, The How of Happiness, The Penguin Press, New York, 2008, pg. 64.

2. Ibid. pg. 181

3. Ibid. pg. 181

4. Ibid. pg. 89

5. Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ, The Experience of Jesus as Lord, Crossroads, New York 1983 pg. 812

6. Ibid. pg. 838

7. Sonja Lyubomirsky, The How of Happiness, The Penguin Press, New York, 2008, pg. 126

8. Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence, Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minnesota, 1995, pg. 188.

