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## Joy in Suffering

Fr. Randy Roche

*Loyola Marymount University*

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## Joy in Suffering

No one deliberately seeks joy by engaging in experiences of suffering. And although joy can certainly accompany suffering, it does not do so automatically any more than pleasurable experiences always lead us to joy. Joy is spontaneous: we can sometimes recognize it immediately in one or other event that is meaningful to us, while at other times we only become aware of joy after reflecting upon external as well as interior occurrences that have already taken place. Difficult as it might have been to go through a period of illness, how pleased we might be in recalling some of the quality decisions we made and some of the care we received from others.

Suffering is not spiritual in itself, but how we deal with it surely impacts our relationship with ourselves and with God. Joy is essentially spiritual in nature, experienced as a gift of goodness, easily and rightly ascribed to the presence of God interacting with us in our present reality.

Though we cannot directly cause joy, and we are unable to put an end to all suffering, we can choose, especially in the midst of suffering, to allow God to be with us. Even though we take every appropriate means that are open to us for the sake of alleviating suffering of mind, body or spirit, we can do so completely on our own, with all our energies focused on ourselves, or we can exercise our spirituality in also looking beyond ourselves for healing and help, compassion and inspiration. Sometimes, joy follows: a sense that even in our suffering we are not alone and that we manage our interior life as best we can.

When we turn to health professionals, friends or family members, we do not usually expect them to immediately put an end to all our suffering, but any and all help is welcome. Some people have healing powers involving medicine while others assist us with their understanding and their presence. Seeking and also allowing God to be personally concerned with our well-being, as well as to be with and in all persons who care for us, can change our perspective. We are not only those who suffer, but at the same time we are good persons who are loved and valued as we are. Such experiences are truly joyful, not in some dramatic fashion, but to the degree that a spontaneous smile is different from a loud exclamation.

Suffering can be rationalized as being "the will of God," but is not experienced in itself as the present and loving action of God within or upon us. Rather, whenever joy reaches into our hearts even in the midst of suffering, it might arrive partially through insight and understanding, but more often joy comes to us when we appreciate that we are loved and also

that we ourselves continue to love. Upon reflection, we might conclude that suffering is neither the opposite of joy, nor can suffering prevent joy.

Joy is of eternity, suffering is not. Joy is a direct consequence of love, suffering is not. Love can and does exist in suffering and transcends it.