

2017 Feast of the Covenant
Joy of the Covenant

Introduction:

Good afternoon brothers and sisters! Maligayang kapistahan ng ating tipan (Happy Feast of the Covenant).

Ang ating pagdiriwang sa taong ito ay may temang - **The JOY of the COVENANT**. Pinagtitibay ng ating tema na ang ating pakikipagtipan sa Panginoon ay may kaakibat na KAGALAKAN. The covenant relationship God has called us into is a covenant of JOY.

We declare and celebrate the truth that nothing can rob us of this joy-- not the growing darkness around us, not the increasing threat of natural calamities that we have been experiencing in the recent months, not the experiences of serious health concerns, sickness, even death, in our community and in our family, not the challenges of livelihood and financial concerns, not the relationship issues we are experiencing. We look above and we look beyond what we see, hear, and experience and be comforted on the truth that all these will not and cannot take away our Joy in the Lord.

Let me share with you my own reflections on the Joy of the covenant.

First reflection: Our Joy – rooted and grounded in Love.

The source of our Joy is rooted and grounded On God's unconditional love. Ang pinaghuhugutan ng ating kagalakan ay ang pag-big na ipinadama at patuloy na ipinadadama ng Diyos sa ating Buhay. For God so loved us that HE gave His Son Jesus. He called us from darkness into his light, from a life of fear to a life of hope. He is present in our life, in good times and in bad). The more we experience the Joy that is rooted in God's love, the more we grow in our confidence in the GOD who is the source of joy. (example of Bea, ad lib).

The source of our confidence is on the experience of God's love all these years. And when we say hindi ako pababayaang ng Diyos, we recognize that living a joyful life does not mean being free from pain and difficulty. *The secret of Joy is not discovered in the absence of trials, but in the midst of them* (James.1:2(NLT) – "When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy". JOY is a FRUIT of the spirit, independent of circumstances; but dependent on God alone who dwells

within us. God alone is the source of our Joy . When we choose and commit to a life of Joy, God's grace and empowerment will follow. Joy is grace that is received and that is lived. Joy is a gift, we cannot manufacture joy, we cannot get it on our own effort, it is freely given. When we live and walk in the Spirit, the fruit of Joy will follow. JOY is a conscious choice. We can choose to rejoice! Let us choose Joy!

How do we sustain our covenant of joy? "Abide in me" (John 15:4). *Our experience of joy flows from our abiding relationship with God.* I read in one commentary the word translated "abide" is one of the Apostle John's favorite words. He uses it 34 times in the Gospel, and 19 times in his letters. To abide is to sustain unbroken fellowship with someone. Why is God so repeatedly asks us to abide in him? Because abiding is an essential requirement for joy. Abiding builds our confidence in the Lord, in good times and in bad.

Second reflection: Our Joy, God's Joy.

Our joy is the joy of the Lord. And the source of our Joy is God alone.

In Isaiah 43:7 the Lord says - "I created you for my glory. I formed you, I made you". We are created for the glory of the Lord. We are formed as covenanted people to glorify HIM. God is glorified when we declare – Ligaya ko ang Panginoon, The Lord is glorified in the praises of His people. When God is glorified, we are filled with joy. The joy of the Lord becomes our joy, the joy of the Lord becomes our strength. So the encouragement for us is to be a people of joy by being faithful in giving glory to the God who called us.

Not only that we are called, we are chosen. In the earlier verse of Isaiah 43:1,4 the Lord says, "... I have called you by name; you are mine...because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1,4). Sa lahat ng tinawag at pinili ng Panginoon, Ano ang palaging tanong – Bakit Ako? Why me? And for what purpose? (that is the reaction of Moses (I am nobody), Isaiah (I am doomed for I am a sinful man), Gideon (giving excuses), etc). That is also my question (example, ad lib); So the answer to the question why me? The song of John Keating can best answer the question – Chosen and precious, beloved as my own, set apart for me, destined for my throne. Go, for I send you, My will you are to do. You did not choose me but I have chosen you. You did not choose me, but from eternity, my own love to be, I have chosen you.

That is the Joy we have...being chosen to give joy to our God.

Third reflection: ***Our covenant, Our journey of joy.***

We are called to Love one another as Christ has loved us. "Magmahalan kayo gaya ng pagmamahal ko sa inyo." (Jn 15:12). We are all in this journey together. Sa ating paglalakbay, tayo ay masasaktan at makakasakit. Kaya nga may grasya ng pagpapatawad at paghingi ng tawad. Mararanasan mo ang madaming unmet expectations, makikita mo ang mga kakulangan at kahinaan ng bawat isa, kasama na siguro ng ating mga namumuno. Kaya nga may grasya ng paggabay ng Diyos, Siya ang tunay na namumuno at siya rin ang magpupuno ng ano mang kahinaan at pagkukulang. Hayaan ninyong ulitin ko ang sinabi ni Rossane – "We are family and no one leaves family".

We are called to draw strength from one another. We cover each other's back. We are called to open our life to serve and be served. The bible said in Romans 12:10 "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other". The joy of the covenant is knowing that we are not alone in our struggle and difficulty. Mahirap ang dumaan sa isang mabigat na pagsubok, subalit mas lubhang mabigat ang dumaan ka sa pagsubok na nagiisa, walang balikat na pwedeng iyakan, walang pwedeng kapitan sa oras ng kahinaan, walang pwedeng pagsabihan ng mga mabibigat na saloobin. Brothers and Sisters, we are a community not because of our activities and our common service, we are a community because of our relationship. God's great gift to us – Let us treasure this greatest gift.

We are chosen and appointed to go and bear fruit – We have a war to fight and a mission to pursue, individually and corporately. Ang bawat isa ay may papel na dapat gampanan, Malaki man o maliit. Lahat ay may kabuluhan at mahalaga sa ating Panginoon. Ang hamon ay hanapin natin ang grasya at ialay ang buo nating kakayahan para sa misyon na sa atin ay kanyang ibinigay.

John13:35 - "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another". Not only we are called to a life of joy through our covenant with one another, but as we love one another, we accomplish the call to be witnesses of God's love in the world.

Fourth Reflection: ***Obedience...Our joyful response.***

When we have Joy, gratitude follows. When our heart is full of gratitude, the best response is Obedience (Pagtalima). Obedience is our grateful response to the exceeding goodness of God. Pagtalima ay pagtalikod,

pagbitiw sa lahat ng ating pinanghahawakan para sumunod sa tawag ng Diyos. That is what radical discipleship is all about.

Sa nakalipas na dalawang taon. *Ang malalim at mabigat na hamon sa bawat isa sa atin ay ang pagtalima na itaya ang lahat (Expand, More Sacrifice, Do not hold back)*. The more we recognize that everything is grace the more we will be challenged to put everything at the disposal of the Lord... especially those that we value and treasure most. And as we respond...the Lord is glorified.

Recently, I am particularly inspired to see many of our children responding in obedience to set aside few years after college to work for CYA as staff workers. Entrusting their life to the loving care and provision of their master. But more inspiring are the parents who are supportive of their children in their decision to pursue and live radical discipleship. Itinaya ang lahat, BIG SACRIFICE INDEED. All I can say to the young people and to the parents – God cannot be outdone in generosity. Walang natatalo sa pagtataya ng buhay sa Panginoon.

C.S Lewis said – “Obedience is the key that opens every door”. What is the door that God wants to open through your obedience? Ask for the grace of God to grant you courage to use the key of obedience so the name of the LORD maybe glorified through you. There is no other way to fullness of joy except through obedience.

In Summary:

- The covenant God has given to us is a covenant of joy. Joy that is founded on God’s unconditional love, joy is not the absence of trials but the presence of God in the midst of them. Our Joy is the Joy of the Lord. The more the Lord is glorified through our life, the more our joy is complete. Our life is a journey with one another, let us treasure our Ligaya family. Lastly, the fullness of joy is through obedience, let us not hold back and give our all to God.

Let me end by inviting everyone to say a prayer with me to honor the Lord by dedicating our life to live a life worthy of the vocation we are called. In the silence of our hearts, let us say a short prayer. Let us end by singing the song – I give you my heart.