

Fourteenth Sunday in Year C
Matthew S. O'Donnell

Lectionary 102:

Isa 66:10-14c [We can rejoice in experiencing God's care]
Ps 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20 [Let all the earth cry out to God with joy]
Gal 6:14-18 [The Cross of Jesus brings about a new creation]
Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 [The Lord appoints seventy-two others for ministry]

Possible preaching themes:

- **Being a disciple** of Jesus is to be experienced by living in community. The ministry of evangelization and the work of continuing Jesus' ministry in contemporary contexts is meant to be shared among Christian believers. Just as Jesus appointed and sent the seventy-two, so too Jesus continues to call disciples today for the mission of sharing Good News in the world.
- **Joy** is an essential mark of a Christian disciple. In a world marked by ample suffering, it can be challenging to cultivate and live in joy. Happiness is an emotion that is often felt in temporary spurts; joy is a way of life that is both a gift shared by God and a way that can help sustain us through difficult moments.
- **Peace:** While suffering is a common experience for human beings, a life rooted in Jesus can help one experience the peace that many are constantly seeking and searching for.

Possible scientific resources:

- **Primatology** is the study of non-human primates. Primatology can assist anthropologists in both understanding the connections between humans and other primates, as well as human evolution <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/primates-in-communities-the-ecology-of-competitive-59119961/>
 - Primates live in communities that can be competitive and mutualistic in their interactions
 - Primate species, like human cultures, are inextricably linked to one another
 - Living in community involves a complex set of relationships
- **Cultivating positive emotions**, like joy, becomes an antidote in moments and situations that the mind and body ordinarily choose negative emotions rooted in past, negative

experiences <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/06/29/1010319240/stuck-in-a-rut-sometimes-joy-takes-a-little-practice>

- Cultivating positive emotions takes practice, discipline, and a choice
- Neuroscientists are finding that people can have influence over their emotions—it is possible to help the body choose the right emotion for a particular experience

- **Empathy:** St. Paul connects his own sufferings to the suffering experienced by Jesus Christ. As humans, it is common to feel and experience the pain of another for oneself. This is the basis of empathy. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/neuroscience-empathy>
 - Mirroring the mind allows us to tap into our own emotions as we try to be empathetic towards another person
 - Sharing in the pain of another is first about understanding one's own experience of pain
 - At times, it is easier to be empathetic to those closest to us than it is to have “global empathy”

Homily outline: Awe Leading to Joy

- When was the last time you **stood in awe** of something?
 - Can you think of such a moment? Were you watching a sunrise or sunset? Were you looking into the face of a newborn? Were you gazing at the majesty of a mountain range or the vastness of the ocean?
 - Have you experienced awe in your relationship with God?
 - Have we lost the ability to be amazed?
 - The challenges we confront in life often strip us of our joy
 - Experiencing awe allows us to see beyond what is right before us

- **We are emotional creatures**
 - Past experiences, and the emotions felt in those experiences, can have an influence in the present moment
 - If someone has hurt us in the past, we may feel mistrust in future relationships
 - If fear has ever consumed you, you might have skepticism about experiencing something new
 - If we live with shame from your past, it might be hard to experience peace
 - Our emotional response in a situation can be immediate, rendering us feeling as though we don't have a choice
 - But we can cultivate a different emotional response and this takes practice

- **St. Paul offers a model**
 - Paul was someone who faced many challenges

- Paul was not perfect, but he embraced God’s call to do something new with his life
- Peace and mercy, as Paul indicates, are spiritual gifts promised to those who embrace a relationship with Jesus Christ

- **Joy is a way of life for Christian disciples**
 - *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)* offers great teaching here (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/pa-pa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)
 - Our encounters with Jesus can set us free from “sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness” (*EG*, 1)
 - “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral” (*EG*, 10)
 - Like St. Paul, even with the challenges of life and discipleship, we can choose to approach our life as disciples in a spirit of joy
 - 2 Corinthians 11:24-28—Lashes, imprisonment, shipwrecks, etc.
 - And still, Paul chooses joy!

- **Look with awe-filled eyes**
 - Finding joy in the “little things of life” can assist us in choosing joy in moments that it doesn’t seem to be our natural response (*EG*, 4)
 - Cultivating gratitude in all circumstances helps us come to a place of believing that God is always with us
 - Awe can help make our lives better https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_reasons_why_awe_makes_your_life_better
 - Living in joy takes practice, and the more we do it the more likely it is that fear, shame, and other negative emotions will no longer be our emotional response to what life throws at us
 - The deeper our relationship with Jesus the more we can live in awe of the unrelenting mercy, the unbridled grace, and the unconditional love God desires to share with us
 - Living in such awe for who God is and what God does will bring us to a place of unspeakable joy
 - Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit—it is a gift shared and a way of life that we can choose for ourselves and bestow upon others
 - Much like St. Paul, choosing to live in joy for ourselves is our gift to share with the communities in which we find ourselves

Tags: awe, empathy, joy, neuroscience, positive emotions

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.