

ONE LAST WORD

Looking more redeemed

“Joy is a problem that must be faced.” This declaration began a famous Easter homily by a Jesuit in a deeply troubled country. He was emphasizing – he perhaps demonstrated – an aspect of spirituality in a world weighed down with personal infidelity and political corruption. It is this: There is no easy joy.

Those who give the Exercises know that the Fourth Week is a hollow experience unless firmly knit to the terrible experiences of the Third. And the experiences of the Third Week are merely imaginary unless they are incarnated somehow in the real personal and social sufferings of the world around.

As far as anyone knows, ignatian leaders do not spend much time on programs for the repair and renewal of the burned out or the deeply wounded. The Servants of the Holy Paraclete run such programs. Thank God for them, and for others like the Benedictines of Münsterschwarzach. They run “Recollectio,” a three-month program for renovation and recuperation. Each participant has a spiritual companion and a therapist, and joins small groups for spiritual conversation and for therapy. The Benedictine in charge says bluntly that the aim of the renovation program is “recovering joy.”

Joy again. It’s what invites people into marriage, a single life of service, the priesthood, and religious life. Dominican Timothy Radcliffe, for instance, says it was the joyful life of an elderly uncle, a Benedictine who loved a large tot of whiskey of an evening, that first attracted the young Radcliffe to religious life and later sustained him as Master General.

If joy is a problem, then, this could be one reason why there are few religious vocations, or, for that matter, why marriages do not seem to be so permanent any more. Nietzsche remarked – sardonically but all too accurately – that Christians ought to live and look a little more redeemed.

What ignatian spirituality says about the problem of joy is well known,

but here it is anyway. The ignatian solution may not help everyone. Those whom it does help have felt in their hearts that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose for each person alive today, themselves miraculously included. They have accepted in their spirits, even in their wounded bodies, Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Standing in troubled societies, they live singing with other worshipers at Mass, "Christ will come again." To judge not only the dead, but also those of us still living in inspirited clay, just waiting to put off corruption and grow into incorruption. It could be that living more mindful of that will help one look a little more redeemed. And be a little more successful at solving this problem of joy.