



2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Psalm 98; Luke 21:5-19

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The Navajo people have a tradition that can inspire Christians and non-Christians alike. It's called the First Laugh Ceremony.

When a Navajo baby laughs for the first time, the family marks this as a sacred milestone. According to Navajo belief, the baby has been dwelling between two worlds: the spirit world and the physical one. That first laugh signals the child's readiness to fully join the human family.

But here's what startles: the baby who elicits that first laugh must host a party. And at this party, the baby becomes the giver. With parents' help, the infant presents each guest with salt, food, and gifts. The child's first human act is generosity, reinforcing one of the Navajo's core virtues of sharing happiness and joy with others. The first lesson: you are here to bless, not to be blessed.¹

Isn't it what *Francis of Assisi* also understood of the universal law of generosity and expressed in the Peace Prayer (attributed to him):

O divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.

¹ Baby's First Laugh [Ceremony](#): A Joyful Navajo Tradition of Celebrating Family

The partial quote from the Peace Prayer taps into the *interconnected nature of human existence*. Every action has a ripple effect. An act of kindness not only benefits the recipient but also enlarges the heart capacity of the giver and generates positivity for the community at large. When we give selflessly, whether be it our time, spiritual or material resources, our abilities, or simply our emotional presence, our willingness to love and to serve in any capacity, it creates a positive cycle. There is human/spiritual growth all around.

Francis reflected well what our ancestors in the faith understood: "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." (**Proverbs 11:25**)

The apostle Paul rightfully counseled in **2 Corinthians 9:7** that "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

My understanding of the mercy of God is that God also loves the one who gives grudgingly. In the experience of giving, God's blessing manifests itself in the silent and unnoticed spiritual growth that a person goes through not unlike the seed that grows underground unknown to the farmer. God actively advances the kingdom even as the process may not be visible.²

Someone once said: "Do you want to be counted among the 2nd happiest group of people? Be grateful. Who wants to be among the 1st happiest group? Be generous."³

In the reading we heard from 2 Thessalonians, Paul is not talking against welfare and pointing a finger at lazy people who need to get off their couch and look for a job. He is most probably encouraging people to continued mutual ministry. A good number of believers in

² Mark 4:26-29

³ Mark Allen Powell in a lecture at the 2025 FB Conference of Ministries

Thessalonica had become obsessed with the imminent end of the world and simply gave up on earthly activities in preparation for the end times.

The traditional understanding is that Paul set up to correct that view and offer a heartfelt exhortation: A member of the Body of Christ doesn't sit around waiting for the Second Coming: all members get busy washing each other's feet and proclaiming the justice of God.

Another scholarly trend is that the Greek term has often been mistranslated in 1 and 2 Thessalonians as "idlers" or "loafers." The word more straightforwardly refers to unruliness or insubordination. It is not so much that believers gave up on their work to sit around and do nothing; rather, they gave up on work to make trouble: it is not that they were not busy, they had become "busybodies," that is unruly, and were probably insisting on their own ideas of how the Church and the leadership should behave.

In today's gospel from Luke, Jesus offers up a doom and gloom message. He certainly doesn't promise peace or ease.

To the disciples who invite him to consider the structural and artistic beauty of the temple, Jesus replies that comfort, security and peace are elusive in this world, especially if it is promised by the powers that be (Herod the "Great" had financed the building of the Temple: One may easily ask, "To whose glory and for what purpose?").

When the world is on fire, our instinct might be that of seeking refuge and finding a place of solace. We might conceive that the church is such a place and we insist that we must be protected from even the mention of trouble. But trouble finds us there.

The fact is not that God has abandoned us and not shielded us from times of terror. We are close to the heart of God during such times. We will not feel so much peace or joy but will share in God's agony.

Ministry, in sync with God, simply will not feel sunny or successful if Jesus is any guide.

Maria Skobtsova, known now as St. Mary of Paris, born 1891 in Latvia, executed in a Nazi concentration camp in 1945 for being part of the French resistance wrote:

“It would be a great lie to tell those who are searching: ‘Go to church, because there you will find peace.’ The opposite is true. The Church tells those who are at peace and asleep: ‘Go to church, because there you will feel real anguish for your sin and the world’s sin. There you will feel an insatiable hunger for Christ’s truth. There, instead of becoming lukewarm, you’ll be set on fire; instead of being pacified, you’ll become alarmed; instead of learning the wisdom of this world, you will become fools for Christ.”⁴

When we fall in love with Jesus, we embrace his teaching and follow him wherever he may go. We become grateful for having been called and made aware and part of God’s kingdom, and respond in kindness with generosity of heart, putting ourselves and our possessions at the service of God. When we pray, “Your Kingdom come,” we pray first of all that our hearts be enlarged and that all people loved by God find a place in our heart. We are God’s and find joy at being with God and at being asked to offer generous help.

There is nothing too little we can offer to God, and all are given the opportunity to grow in spirit. May we be found among the 1st happiest group of generous people. Amen.

⁴ [Maria of Paris: “a great lie to tell searching souls” | Dover Beach](#)