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CATHOLICISM AND JOY

BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

Saint Thomas Aquinas was once asked what God does all day. The answer of the greatest theologian in the Catholic tradition was simple and beautiful: "He enjoys himself!" To put this more technically, God rests in the perfection and goodness of his own existence, and in that act finds unsurpassable joy. That same Thomas Aquinas, following the Platonic tradition, also taught that *bonum est diffusivum sui* (the good is diffusive of itself), meaning that goodness tends to overflow, effervesce, give itself away. This is why, furthermore, God's sheer joy in himself bubbles over into creation, the Creator, as it were, sharing the goodness that he has. How wonderful and mysterious that on the night before he died Jesus, an emissary from the very inner life of God, said to his disciples, "I have told you these things that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (cf. Jn 15:11).

Catholicism is indeed about doctrine, liturgy, sacraments, the saints, art and architecture, councils, and popes, but finally it's about the joy of sharing the divine life. Don't we sense this in the playful humor of Saint Philip Neri, in the exuberance of G.K. Chesterton, in the wry smile of Saint John Paul II? And wasn't the poet right when he said, "joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts, announcing that the King is in residence today"?

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The Visitation (detail), Franz Anton Maulbertsch (1724-1796).
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