



St Francis: The Greatest Joy

In Italy, near the city of Perugia, is the place called Assisi, the birth place of a very popular saint named Francis. He was the son of a wealthy merchant, but he took up the life of renunciation. Committed to a life of self-imposed poverty, humility, and devotion, he attracted many to follow him.

One day he was walking with one brother Leo from Perugia to a very famous temple, St. Maria of the Angel. He was walking for miles and miles, and it was freezing cold. It was raining and snowing. He asked his brother Leo, "I want you to write down whatever I say." They were walking and it was already night time. He said, "What is perfect joy? If our brothers give excellent sermons glorifying our God, I do not consider that perfect joy. If our brothers give sight to the blind, they give ability to the lame to walk and to run, they give ability to the dumb to speak and deaf to hear, and even if they raise a dead man back to life, I do not consider that is perfect joy. Even if our brothers are so deeply learned that they know all philosophy and they know all the science and they have memorized expertly all the holy scriptures, I do not consider that perfect joy. Even if our brothers can prophesize what's going to happen and tell the future and understand astrology and understand the intelligence and the mentality of all species of life and reciprocate with all species in that way, I do not consider that perfect joy."

Brother Leo was surprised and asked, "Then what is perfect joy?" Saint Francis said, "If we can preach the message of God and convert every human being in the entire world to our faith, I do not consider that perfect joy." So finally brother Leo said, "Francis, please tell me what then is perfect joy?" He said, "When we get to our destination St. Maria of the Angel and it is freezing cold in the middle of the night, we are covered with mud, and it's raining on us, and we are starving of hunger and thirst, and then we desperately knock on the door. Then our brother answers the door and he asks, 'Who are you?' We say, 'We are your brothers, this is Leo and I am Francis. We have come to be with you, to

have communion with you. Please give us shelter.' Then he looks up with scorn in his eyes, and says, 'You are not my brothers. You are liars. You are despicable, low grade thieves pretending to be saints. You are exploiting and torturing poor people. You deserve to be punished. Get out from here.' And then he slams the door in our face. I consider that if we bear that and thank God and forgive that man- that is perfect joy."

"Then outside we are suffering so badly and we are freezing, we are starving, we are dying and we are desperately knocking on the door again and he comes to the door and he says, 'Oh, you are back.' We say, 'My brother, we are your brothers. Please show mercy to us, show kindness to us, we are starving, we are freezing, and we are dying.' Then that man becomes so angry, he picks up a big heavy stick, comes out and screams at us, and grabs us by the neck and repeatedly hits us until we are laying in the snow in a bloody mess and he just leaves us there freezing, beaten, and blasphemed. In that state, if we could remember our Lord and think, 'My Lord I have tolerated all of this and forgiven this man as an offering of my love to You' - brother Leo, that is perfect joy. To expect and bear whatever may come into our life and remember the Lord, forgive and love our brother under all circumstances as an offering to the Lord, that is perfect joy."

This quality of forgiveness is more illuminating than the light of the sun. Those who "justice or setback to us has to be seen as God's arrangement. Not a blade of grass moves without the sanction of the Lord. To tolerate and to maintain the consciousness of forgiveness and compassion means, to pray as a well-wisher of everyone – whether our friends, our family members, and even our competitors and our persecutors. And thus see every situation as an opportunity to sincerely take shelter of the Lord.