

*Happiness is not a luxury:  
It is within us as ourselves.*

(Paul Claudel)

By Rev. Scott J. Pontes

God wants all of us to experience happiness in this life and to be happy with Him for all eternity. If we believe that God is good, and that He created us to be like Him, how can we think that happiness is a luxury?

In the first book of the Bible it is written, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). If we are created in His image and likeness, how can we believe that God does not want to give us joy?

Many times, especially as we enter the Lent season, we think of everything we have to give up. We have a tendency to look at life as a sadness rather than joy because we equate this time with self-denial and fasting. But on the contrary, this is a time when we prepare for the great feast - the joy of the Lord's Resurrection - the day we celebrate the happiness that is within us. True happiness comes from the Lord and this Lent season is an opportunity to prepare our souls to find it.

If we know where this happiness lies... then the questions remains... how can we find it? The answer is simple and can be found in the three keys to Lent.

The first key is **prayer**. We already know how to pray and we know that we are called to pray more at this time, but the challenge is greater than this. It is to pray in a deeper way and to communicate more with God. That means feeding our relationship with Him, our friendship with God by nurturing it, attending to it, and giving attention to that relationship. When we open our hearts and let God speak to us from within, we experience this happiness.

The second Lenten key is **fasting**. This can be difficult for us because we often think that fasting equals unhappiness. But it is exactly the opposite; by fasting, we recognize that there is something missing in our lives, and we look to God to fill this void. As we experience this, we experience the greatness and goodness of God.

The third key is **almsgiving**. When we hear this word, we think immediately of our wallets and money. In fact, giving alms can be much more than money. We can give alms with our time and with our talent. Many times we are already doing this as we volunteer and share our gifts with different ministries in the Church, charities, and other organizations. Almsgiving means being good stewards of the gifts we receive from God.

God is calling us to be happy. This happiness is not a luxury, but it is a promise that God makes to each one of us! Let us begin this blessed time by using these Lenten keys to obtain this happiness

that has been given to us in the Risen  
Christ!