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SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME - JANUARY 15, 2023

This past year, a Catholic magazine from the United States had an opportunity to interview Pope Francis. The interview covered a wide range of topics from international politics to conflicts within the Church. At one point, the editor of the magazine told Pope Francis that people often say to him that they notice how joyful and free he always seems to be even though he has so many responsibilities. He went on to say that he is often asked what makes Pope Francis so peaceful and happy. The Pope told the editor that it was not a "what" that is the source of his joy but a "who" - Jesus Christ. He went on to explain that his relationship with our Lord is what keeps him peaceful and free even when faced with all the complex problems in the Church and the world.

It is so important for us to remind ourselves that there is nothing more important than this relationship with Jesus. It is easy to lose sight of this when we are struggling. Sometimes we get so focused on following rules and keeping score that we forget that the real purpose of our faith is to draw us into a relationship of love with Jesus. Sometimes it just seems easier to follow the rules than to show love and mercy to others. Sometimes it just seems easier to point out what others are doing wrong than to

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look into our own hearts and confess what we are doing wrong. However, when that happens, we lose our peace and joy. That is when we have to be reminded to look to Jesus and His unfailing love for us.

Today's gospel begins with a line that we might overlook but that is very significant. "John the Baptist SAW JESUS COMING TOWARD HIM..." When John the Baptist catches sight of Jesus, it causes him to speak joyfully and forcefully. Jesus was the center of John the Baptist's whole life. Even when he didn't know that Jesus was the "One who is to come", he tirelessly proclaimed Him to the people. As John the Baptist himself says, He is the reason he came baptizing with water.

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We often make sacrifices for those we love. We might go without sleep to take care of a sick child or travel miles out of our way just to spend time with a parent or friend. We do it all out of love. And at the time, it might not seem difficult because we are more focused on the one we love rather than on any inconvenience they might be causing us. The same is true for our relationship with Jesus. Inconnvenient as it might be for us. When the love of Jesus Christ becomes the center of our lives, then we are free to do great things.

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Today's responsorial psalm speaks to this in a beautiful way. Whoever wrote it had a powerful experience of God's love in his life. God heard his cry of anguish and answered his prayer.

As our Holy Father reminds us, the secret to peace, joy, and true freedom is really no secret at all. It comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. And that relationship is open to all people. All we have to do is invite Him into our hearts. In the Book of Revelation we read, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). We gather here today to take up Jesus' invitation to dine with Him. It is here, in this place, that we hear Jesus speak to us through His word and receive His Body and Blood at the table of the Eucharist. Here we come face to face with the Risen Lord and experience friendship with Him and one another.