

Each day dawns differently. The duties of each day differ, but our duty does not. Our duty is to follow Christ wherever Christ leads us – and this may lead us through a seemingly similar set of duties each day : the steady plod of providing for a family, putting food on the table, turning up for work – whether at home or away, or this duty, that is our faith in Christ, may lead us in entirely unexpected ways, to new duties quite unseen before – but the duty to Christ, to God, remains the same. In this sense we are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty. And we can also understand Paul's description of himself as a prisoner not only in the very real physical sense of being imprisoned because of his preaching but in the sense of being bound to Christ as his prisoner. But 'mere duty', that is acting as Christ's servant, is not said in order to diminish the spiritual importance of whatever we are called to do next, indeed it enhances it – it turns it from a mere slog without Christ into an opportunity to work for Christ in the power and grace and joy of his spirit, for it's an invitation also to allow God to do in us what we might not otherwise wish or attempt to do on our own. This acting out of a sense of duty can then be transformed into an act of love. This is our faith in Christ made meaningful by allowing his faith in us to find expression – the service of God is the service of one another. And this becomes a great source of joy – not a contrived joy, I'll grin and bear this and put on a smiling face (though that can be helpful at first and apparently if one wants ones children to eat their broccoli one must give it to them with a smile- or so I heard on the radio last night) , No, the joy will come simply by doing the next most loving thing to do, which has become a bit of a refrain lately. Classically, in the midst of grief, organising a funeral, seeing to a person's belongings etc can be a source of coping but we're not just talking about a strategy for coping here – we're talking about how love actually works, how divine love is incarnated in our actions, how grace comes unexpectedly to inspire us in what might otherwise be dismissed and despised as the merely mundane. We're talking here of that wonderful Benedictine insight that the tools of good works are to be used without grumbling because it is precisely there that God is at work in us and in the world . Indeed if this ' enjoyment' of duty is not there then there's a strong possibility that God is not at work either. And who would want that?

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