



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5211

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WELCOME

Lydia Talbot: Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” We’re happy you’ve joined us for this half-hour of reflection on faith. I’m Lydia Talbot.

Daniel Pawlus: And I’m Daniel Pawlus. Our guest today is Fr. John Jenkins, President of Notre Dame University. Fr. Jenkins is going to talk to us about “hope.”

Lydia Talbot: We also welcome back our friend, Christine Chakoian, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois. She’ll continue our series on the “fruits of the spirit,” looking today at “joy.”

Daniel Pawlus: And as always, we begin with a personal story. Today we meet Eunice Mangwane, a South Africa woman whose community was devastated by the AIDS epidemic. She was recently at St. James Episcopal Cathedral in Chicago to tell how the women in her village put their faith to action, creating a magnificent work of religious art that tells the story of their struggle, and ultimately, their hope. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Eunice Mangwane: I’m living in Hamburg. That is a rural area within the eastern cape in South Africa. Before Dr. Baker came and stayed in Hamburg, things were very bad. People were very much hit by this epidemic of HIV and AIDS. When she came to Hamburg things slowly started to change because she was then creating jobs for people. She saw the Isenheim altarpiece, I think it was in France. Immediately she associated it with what is happening in Hamburg because with the Isenheim altarpiece people were dying in the 15th century of the St. Anthony’s poisoning and people were not accepted by their families. Likewise with HIV and AIDS.

It was about one hundred and twenty women that worked on the altarpiece and it took them six to seven months. Some of them were infected. Some of them were affected. If you look at the first panel you’ll find that we’ve used darker colors of cotton. There are children on this panel but they haven’t got smiling faces. There are the orphans that we as grandmothers had got to carry the burden of them. When we open up to the second panel, you’ll notice that we haven’t used dark colors of cotton. Birds are there. Fishes are there. The footprints are there. The last panel you’ll see that it’s glittering and that is the Tree of Hope and there is a river that is running down. That is the Keiskamma River. The middle picture, that’s myself and my three grandchildren. The one with the striped shirt his name is Lithemba. He is infected by HIV/AIDS. When we tested Lithemba it was so hard for me to accept. And yet I stand in front of the public daily and I say we’ve got to accept it. But for me it was not easy.

Before I got involved with the project, I used to think quite badly about people with sexually transmitted diseases. But when I started working with them and counseled them and hear the different ways how they have been infected by this particular virus, it changed me. My way of thinking, my way at looking at things. And worst of it all, when my children got infected then it was totally something different. I'm telling you, when it knocks to your doorstep then it's something different.

There is a Tree of Hope in Hamburg and that Tree of Hope is so important. When it's very dry in Hamburg, people would gather and they would pray and ask God if there is no way that the rain can come down. The weather would start changing and then we would all say that God has listened to our prayers. It is still happening in Hamburg.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Lydia Talbot: Eunice Mangwane has returned to South Africa to continue her work in the village of Hamburg. And the Keiskamma Altarpiece, following a national tour that began and ended in Chicago, has traveled to London and will soon return home as well. For more information about this story, you can go to our website at 30goodminutes.org.

Now, let me tell you about our speaker. Fr. John Jenkins is a Notre Dame and Oxford University educated philosopher, who joined the faculty of Notre Dame University in 1990. He served as religious superior of the Holy Cross priests and brothers at Notre Dame, and then as vice president and associate provost, before being appointed President of the university in 2005. Fr. Jenkins' particular interest is in the areas of ancient philosophy and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of "Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas." We're delighted to welcome Fr. John Jenkins to his first appearance on "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Fr. Jenkins.

MESSAGE

John Jenkins: Thank you.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Spirit." St. Paul's letter to the Romans.

Renewing the earth is challenging in all times, and certainly in this time. The list of challenges we all face is well known: war and violent conflict; bigotry and hatred and even genocide; desperate poverty around the world; injustice of many kinds; disease. It is a wearying list.

At the University of Notre Dame we recently held a forum devoted to issues of energy and the environment. The challenges in this area include, but go well beyond, high prices at the gas pump. There are serious issues of environmental degradation on the land and in the oceans. We face the depletion of reserves of fossil fuels—the primary source of energy in the world—in the lifetimes of our students. Higher energy prices, and the use of crops for biofuels have contributed to high food prices that have caused starvation and malnutrition for very poor nations. It is fair to say that competition for every more scarce energy resources have contributed to political instability and war in many parts of the world. What should be our response to this and other challenging issues?

Because I work at a university, I think a lot about young people and how they see the world. My fervent prayer for them is that they will not be tempted to be cynical or despairing but will use their talents to improve the world. Indeed, for all of us, whatever challenges we face, and no matter how serious they are, my fervent prayer is that God will afflict us with hope. I pray that we will be people that see the world and its problems with a steady, honest, unflinching gaze: that, because of our faith in God's goodness, we will apply all our knowledge and skill to a thoughtful, fair, balanced analysis of those issues; that we never flag in seeking solutions, and in encouraging others to do so; and, perhaps most importantly, that we will have the courage and conviction to act when action is called for, and that we will inspire others to act as well; all that is part of living a life of hope.

Now hope may be confused with optimism, but it is really very different. Optimism is simply the conviction that whatever the challenges, the situation is not really deeply problematic or grave. No matter how bad the situation, a solution, the optimist is convinced, is just around the corner.

I read a book this summer about the events leading up to World War II. In reading about these events, it is striking how many leaders were committed to a kind of dogged optimism in the face of looming disaster. Hitler and the Nazis could be mollified, they assured themselves and others; they were not a serious threat. Such optimism might have been justified when Hitler first took power. But as promise after promise was broken, as Jews were more and more victimized, as one small nation after another was overrun, as the preparations for war advanced, it is hard to understand this attitude. Some seem to have been committed to an optimism that led them to believe firmly that the threat was not so serious and disaster could be avoided, until the bloodiest and most destructive war in human history was upon them.

Contrary to optimism is pessimism, and that is also a temptation when faced with a grave situation. The pessimist believes the problems are not only grave; they're insoluble, response is futile. The only challenge for us is to accept the doom that is imminent.

There are perhaps few examples of those who are fully explicit in articulating and embracing such a pessimistic view. Yet I do think it is implicit in those who, when confronted with the evil of genocide or the tragedy of mass starvation, respond by shrugging their shoulders and saying, "Nothing can be done." And if, of course, nothing can be done to address these issues, the only thing we can do is to accept and live with the evil.

Hope does have something in common with both optimism and pessimism. Together with optimism, on one hand, it believes in a fruitful solution and it shares with pessimism an evaluation of the situation that is unflinching and unvarnished. Yet, despite similarities, it stands in profound contrast to both pessimism and optimism. For both optimism and pessimism excuse us from analysis, thought, and action. For the optimist, the problem is really not so grave and so a vigorous response is unnecessary. For the pessimist, the problem is so grave that a response is futile. And so both, for contrary reasons, excuse one from serious thought and courageous action.

Hope, on the other hand, does not excuse; it demands. It demands first of all that we see the world as it is. It demands that we assess, seek to understand, analyze, think, argue, seek

solutions, overcome frustrations and failures. And, most importantly, it demands the courage and commitment of common action.

Jesus took the last supper on the night before his crucifixion to teach his closest followers about hope. They had seen him as the solution to all political, economic, religious, and personal problems. And he took that night to tell them that he would be given over to the most painful and ignominious death. The disciples no doubt would have wanted to believe that it all wasn't so and avoid the anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Gospel, Peter rebuked Jesus for suggesting that he would suffer and die. And after Jesus' death, there was no doubt something in them that would have wanted to despair and hide in locked rooms. But Jesus called them to a hope that transcends suffering, death, and evil.

As St. Paul writes in Ephesians, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know where is the hope to which he has called you..." [Eph 1:18]. May God enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may know the hope to which we are called.

And so I pray, "Lord, afflict us with hope." Let us not seek comfort in a blind optimism or a despairing pessimism. Let us confront the issues of our day with perspicacious honesty. Let us respond with courage. Let us call others to the same hope. Through these efforts we can renew the face of the earth.

CONVERSATION

Daniel Pawlus: If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Fr. John Jenkins, we'll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org to watch the video or read the text anytime. Now, let's talk with Fr. John Jenkins.

Fr. Jenkins, thank you for your message today and making it down here to be with us. I'd like to start by asking you about Notre Dame University in general. My experience with graduates and anyone that's had or spent time there has been so incredibly positive. What is the spirit that is talked about, taught, that happens at that university? Because there is something very special, I think.

John Jenkins: You know, Dan, there are many things. And obviously there is a sports tradition and there is the wonderful tradition of the university. But I really believe what's special is the life of faith. It allows students and faculty and the whole university community to come together at a deeper level—in their dorms, at religious services—to talk about issues of greater depth. It allows us to go more deeply and, I think, form deeper bonds of community. It allows our students to have a sense of service, a sense of a purpose beyond themselves. And I think that instills a great devotion and a sense of spirit. I really believe the spirit of Notre Dame at really it's deepest level is that spirit of faith.

Daniel Pawlus: That's a wonderful thing.

Lydia Talbot: Fr. Jenkins, you talk about talking to students with depth. How do you? What is the language of faith that you use with students at Notre Dame when you're talking about the wounded world in which we live; students who may be on the brink of despair?

John Jenkins: You know, I think students know the problems of this world and they may be tempted toward a certain despair or a certain cynicism. But I think they, like us, really want to hear words of hope. I really do believe they want to hear words of hope, not in a dishonest way or disingenuous way but really to talk about what can they hope for. It allows one to enter into a conversation. I think all great education is a conversation. It's not telling someone what to think. It's entering and engaging a conversation. Once you have them there, I think you can draw them to a deeper level and they come up with their own discoveries and insights.

Lydia Talbot: You so masterfully in your message discern the difference between hope and optimism, or wishful thinking, if you will. I would love to know, and Daniel too, what on your own journey—to the priesthood, to Oxford, to your distinguished role as president of Notre Dame University—were those moments along the way when you struggled to hold on to hope?

John Jenkins: When I graduated, I graduated from Notre Dame, Lydia, and I remember that at that point you have a moment of truth and you sort of ask, What am I going to do with my life? I'm through with school, where am I going? I thought about many things. I thought about graduate school. But what was lacking in my life was a real sense of purpose. I knew whatever I did it had to be meaningful. It had to have something that had significance for me. And that was a kind of struggling time. It was a difficult time. But that deepened my faith because it led me to: What do I really hope for? What is important for me? And that gradually led to me to a life a prayer, reflection on my faith. It gradually led me to the seminary and to my priesthood. I know that throughout my life...as a priest you confront many sad situations, death and disease, in people's personal lives and you try to tell them something that will give them hope. But what always comes back to me is that sense of faith that God draws us to a deeper hope, a hope beyond the immediate to do something transcendent. That has always sustained me in my life in ministry.

Daniel Pawlus: You talk about hope as being very intentional and conscious, as well. It's something of action versus sitting back. Do you want to speak a little bit more about that?

John Jenkins: I do feel that sometimes religious people are portrayed as sort of having this "pie in the sky" view and everything is fine, everything is lovely. I don't think that's true. I think genuine faith sees the world as it is and there's no veneer or mask of all of suffering in the world. It's precisely because you can hope in God's power that you can look at the suffering without blinking it away, an unflinching gaze. And precisely that can lead you to action. If it doesn't lead you to action, something is missing there because it just commands us to respond. Not that we're going to solve all the problems of the world, but we can do something. If we don't respond, as I say, it does become a sort of pessimism that just despairs.

Lydia Talbot: So that faith without action is no faith at all.

John Jenkins: Right.

Lydia Talbot: Let's talk more about what constitutes authentic action. Who do you point to today in the realm of faith you're in touch with or know who are living out their faith with authentic action?

Daniel Pawlus: And who would you call out as examples for students in that conversation as well?

John Jenkins: There are so many people who in such powerful ways are devout in that life of hope, that life of action. I could name Mother Teresa or I could name a Martin Luther King. But I really believe that for each person, it is their personal calling how they will respond. I think working on "30 Good Minutes," as you're doing, is one response to spread the word. I think for some, they're doctors and very dedicated doctors who really care for their patients. For some, they're lawyers. For some, they're business people. Everyone responds in a different way, but if you approach your calling with a sense of service, a sense of making the world better, I think you are a beacon of hope! And I've met people, the most ordinary people—and you wouldn't know them—in many positions, but just how they act they really kind of proclaim hope.

Lydia Talbot: Have you always known that you were headed for the priesthood or were there moments of resistance or kicking and screaming?

John Jenkins: Oh yes! I think through my high school days, college days, it was in the back of my mind but not in the forefront. It really was that moment when I was forced to ask myself: What am I going to do with my life? Here I am, what am I going to do with my life? God gradually, not right away, led me to this life. As I said, I knew I wanted a meaningful life and I've been richly rewarded. It's been a very meaningful life.

Lydia Talbot: Your book on Thomas Aquinas. Give us a little bit of that. Thomas Aquinas must have been a huge inspiration in your pursuit of philosophy.

John Jenkins: Yeah. What I loved about Thomas, from the first time I read him until today, is that on one hand he's a thinker committed completely to reason. I mean if you read his works there's just a clarity of argument and reasoning that is so impressive. And at the same time, he believes that reason can't get us to God; that God transcends our understanding, transcends our language. So there is this wonderful combination, I think, in Aquinas of reason and mysticism, of a commitment to thought and faith, that just seems right to me. I mean it has always seemed right to me and it still seems right to me that that is the kind of heart of a life of faith.

Daniel Pawlus: Fr. Jenkins, we are just delighted that you've been able to join us today, to come down from South Bend, and we wish you all the best in your position. Thank you so much for being here.

John Jenkins: It's been a pleasure to be here! Thank you very much, Dan and Lydia.

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: And now we turn to another in our series this season on the nine "Fruits of the

Spirit.” Today, Christine Chakoian, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, reflects on “joy.”

REFLECTION

Christine Chakoian: Sometimes joy is hard to come by. When times are tough, or stress is overwhelming, it’s difficult for me to feel joyful. But joy isn’t always dependent on happy circumstances. Sometimes joy is a matter of paying attention: looking for God’s presence that shines everywhere. Mindfulness is what psychologists call it these days. A beautiful prayer from a funeral service, of all places, says it this way: “Help us to walk amid the things of this world with eyes open to the beauty and glory of the eternal; so that, among the many changes of this life, our hearts may surely be fixed where true joy is to be found.” We all have access to joy at all times—even in grief—because of God’s astonishing beauty that unfolds in our presence all the time.

CLOSING

Daniel Pawlus: Thank you, Chris, and our thanks again to Fr. John Jenkins, Eunice Mangwane, and you for being with us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Daniel Pawlus.

Lydia Talbot: And I’m Lydia Talbot. As we go, I encourage you to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org for more information about today’s program and an extensive collection of other messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at “30 Good Minutes,” may peace be with you in the week ahead.