

Happiness and Virtue

By Deacon Tim Sullivan

There has been a big change in our country in our attitudes about happiness. It used to be that happiness was associated with leading an objectively good life. Nowadays happiness is identified with how a person feels.

Most of us know that the Declaration of Independence affirms the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” What we don’t know is that our founders believed that happiness was synonymous with virtue. As John Adams once said, “The purpose of democracy is to create the conditions in which virtue will flourish.”

The focus of the founders of our nation on virtue has obviously gotten lost. Do abortion, no-fault divorce, legalized gambling and recreational marijuana promote virtue?

It used to be that one’s reputation for personal honesty and integrity was highly valued and protected. Not so much anymore. Today, hype and spin are rampant.

If virtue is to regain its important place in our culture, then parents will have to work harder to instill virtue in their children. To be successful at this, parents will have to not only teach virtue but will have to model virtue for their children.

The Catholic Catechism defines virtue this way: “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.”

We’ll take a look at specific virtues in upcoming articles.

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8