

# **JOHN PAUL II**

## **Sexuality and the Gift of Joy**

# George Mallory (1886-1924)





*The first question which you will ask and which I must try to answer is this, “What is the use of climbing Mount Everest?” and my answer must at once be, “It is no use.” There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever... We shall not bring back a single piece of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron... It’s no use. So, if you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself upward and forever upward, then you won’t see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for.*

# John Paul II's writings

- Many and complex
- draw on 4 of them:

*Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987)      **SRS**

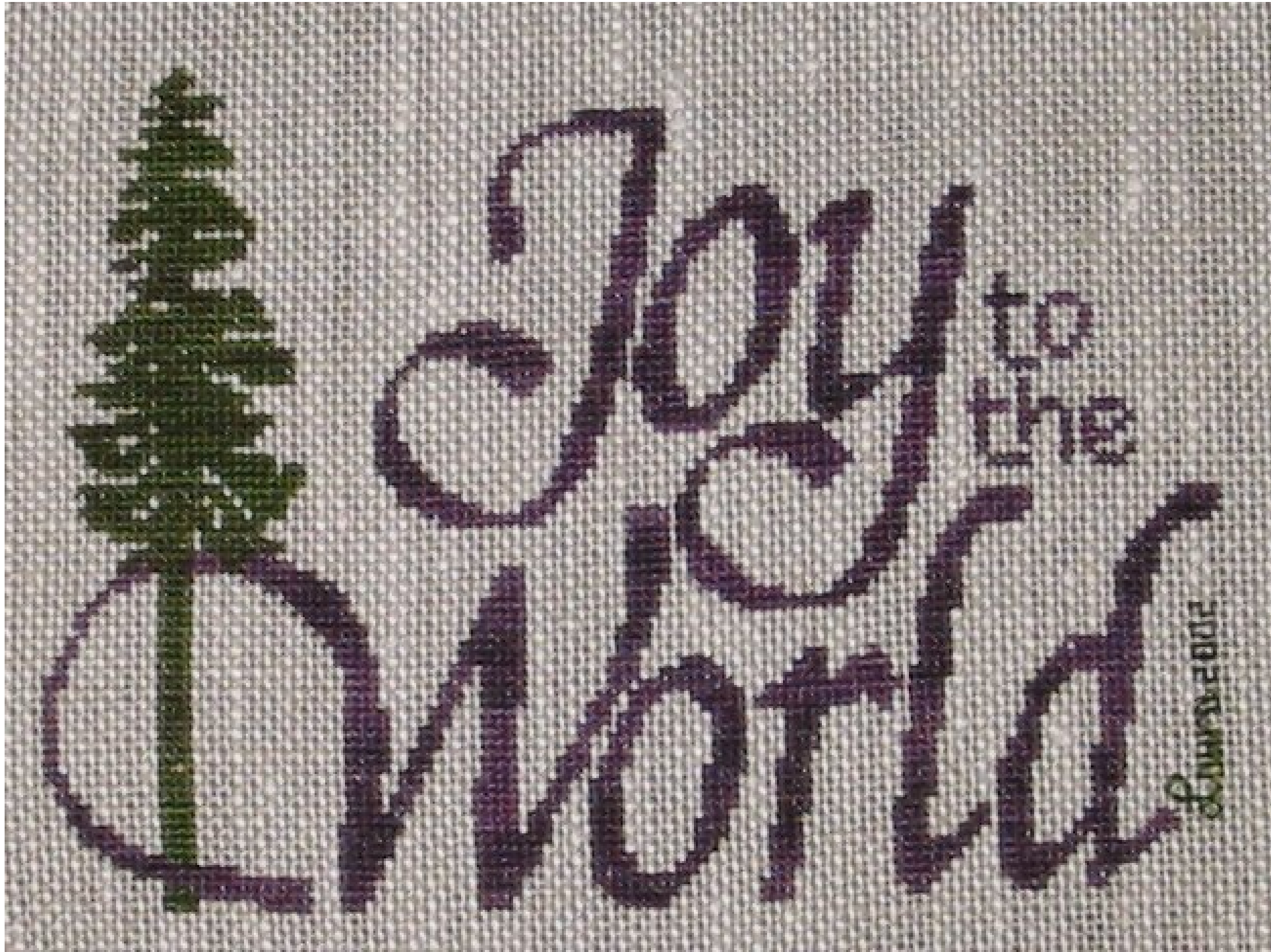
*Veritatis splendor* (1993)      **VS**

*Evangelium vitae* (1995)      **EV**

*Fides et ratio* (1998)      **FR**

# Aim

To show how the themes of *joy*, *truth*, *freedom* and *sexuality* are profoundly linked in these four encyclicals



# Christianity: an optimistic faith

- Creation and relation (Gen 1 &2) precede deflation (Gen 3)
- John's summary of Jesus' mission (3.16):  
*“for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”*
- the first words of *Evangelium vitae*

# Theological commentary

- Evil is not the norm of life but good, no matter how prevalent or strong evil seems
- evil is always parasitic, riding on the back of good
- Paul tells us to ‘*rejoice always*’ (1 Thess 5.16); joy is the basis of Christian life

## **J H Newman on joy**

*“Gloom is no Christian temper; that repentance is not real which has not love in it; that self-chastisement is not acceptable which is not sweetened by faith and cheerfulness. We must live in sunshine, even when we sorrow; we must live in God’s presence, we must not shut ourselves up in our own hearts , even when we are reckoning up our past sins... We must look abroad into this fair world, which God made ‘very good’*

*- E Pryzwara, The Heart of Newman -*

# Contrast in consumer societies

- *“a naïve mechanistic optimism has been replaced by a well-founded anxiety for the fate of humanity” (SRS 27)*
- an addiction to over-consumption has led only to growing dissatisfaction (SRS 28)

# Signs of a 'culture of death'

- Despite being over-sated with 'entertainment' consumer society shows the very opposite of joy
- vast entertainment centres, digitalised forms of sex and community, increasingly isolated electronic games are signs of a growing 'boredom' at the heart of life

# Loneliness

*“We seek a private house, a private means of transport, a private garden, private laundry, self-service stores and do-it-yourself skills. An enormous technology seems to have set itself the task of making it unnecessary for one human being ever to ask anything of another. Even in the family, each member should have a separate room, separate telephone, TV and car, if possible. We seek more and more privacy and feel more and more alienated and lonely when we get it. What accidental contacts we do have seem intrusive not only because they are unsought but because they are unconnected with any familiar pattern of dependence. Slater, **The Pursuit of Loneliness***

# Where we are heading

- We are reaching a point of denying that the objective beauty of goods in themselves can compel or interest us
- only a continually changing diet of new stimulations can keep at bay the sheer ennui of being alive

# Radical difference of the Christian vision of joy

- Of its nature joy presupposes giving and receiving - so relationship with others
- in true joy there is always a sacrificial element of self-loss
- such mutual giving creates something new, a third, such as a child
- this will be an important aspect of integral sexuality

# Joy overflows



The image features a background of marbled paper with a complex, organic pattern of grey, white, and light brown tones. A thin white rectangular border is centered on the page. Inside this border, the word "TRUTH" is written in a large, bold, black, serif font. To the left of the word, there is a vertical white line that is slightly shorter than the height of the text.

**TRUTH**

*Requiescat In Pace*

*Pope John Paul II*

*1920-2005*

*"Do not abandon yourselves to despair.  
We are the Easter people and  
hallelujah is our song."*



# FR 4

*“The truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love.”*

- The second part of the 20th century made more obvious an ever growing split between the moral sense of the Church and that of contemporary society
- this has made it very difficult for young people who need a strong philosophical and religious base on which to build their lives
- cf FR 6

*“It is undeniable that this time of rapid and complex change can leave especially the younger generation, to whom the future belongs and on whom it depends, with a sense that they have no valid points of reference. The need for a foundation for personal and communal life becomes all the more pressing at a time when we are faced with the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast in doubt...”*

# The impact of post-modernity

- This despair in finding a true base exists not just in morality but in finding any reference point for meaning and truth in life
- the vision of post-modernity is well captured in this model of Wright

**Realms**

**Modernity**

**Post-Modernity**

*Knowledge*

neutral knowledge

points of view

*and*

*Truth*

objective values

preferences

*The*

*Self*

the autonomous  
individual

a bundle of  
competing drives

*The*

*Story*

progress to  
enlightenment

all metanarratives  
are hidden  
oppression

# JPII's response to post-modernity

- He does not start with abstract principles but the concrete - to follow Jesus (VS 6-25)
- in Christ you find the person to set you free and bring you to happiness (Mt 19.16-22)
- the seed of the Transcendent lies in every heart, ready to reach out for the Divine (FR 24)
- Christ brings an entirely new sense of freedom cf 2 Cor 3.5-18

# Some implications

- Conscience discovers truth but does not create it (VS 54-55)
- Jesus' death points to the weaknesses and limits of human reason (FR 23)
- each must be respected in their unique journey towards truth in Christ

The image features a background of marbled paper with a complex, organic pattern of grey, white, and light brown tones. A thin white rectangular border is centered on the page. Inside this border, the word "FREEDOM" is written in a large, bold, black, serif font. To the left of the word, there is a vertical white line that is slightly shorter than the height of the text.

**FREEDOM**



- All people and creatures are interconnected; this influences all moral activity (SRS34)
- some forms of individualism today virtually deny our common humanity
- the pope also rejects current forms of scientific thought that deny human freedom and responsibility and the sort of relativism that takes the majority view as the basis of morality

- Christian morality is rather first of all a life and a call not a set of rules
- it is precisely the following of Christ that resolves our questions about right and wrong, and what it is to be free (VS 6-24)

- In a world lacking anything transcendent all can be disposed of so nothing compels our love
- this creates a rootless and restless society
- true joy does not need anything beyond itself; in that sense it is ‘pointless’
- it opens one to the obedience of love wherever it may lead cf Mary’s *fiat*



The background is a light-colored marbled paper with a complex, organic pattern of grey and white veins. A thin white rectangular border is centered on the page, enclosing the text. On the left side of this border, there is a vertical white bar.

# **SEXUALITY**

# Life-giving friendship

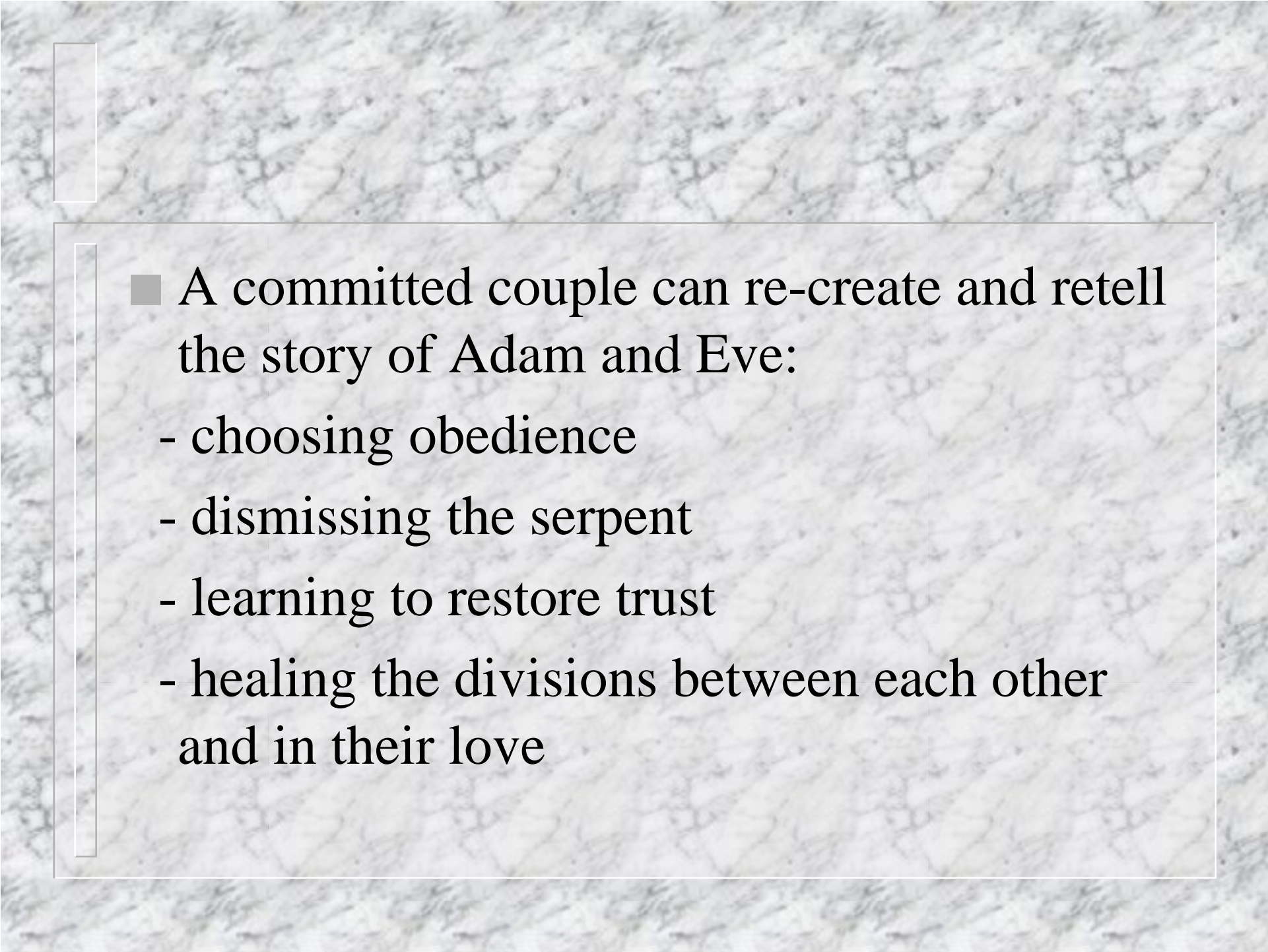


- Sexuality derives its meaning from life and love (EV)
- the unique dimension of sexual loving comes from our human call to be co-creators and ministers of creation (EV 52)
- true sexual loving embodies the gift of self just as Christ gave his life for others (EV 49)



- The need for committed truth and friendship is essential for a young person's journey to freedom and joy
- committed love flies against the claims of post-modernity that no narrative can be absolute, and that there can be no claim to total allegiance

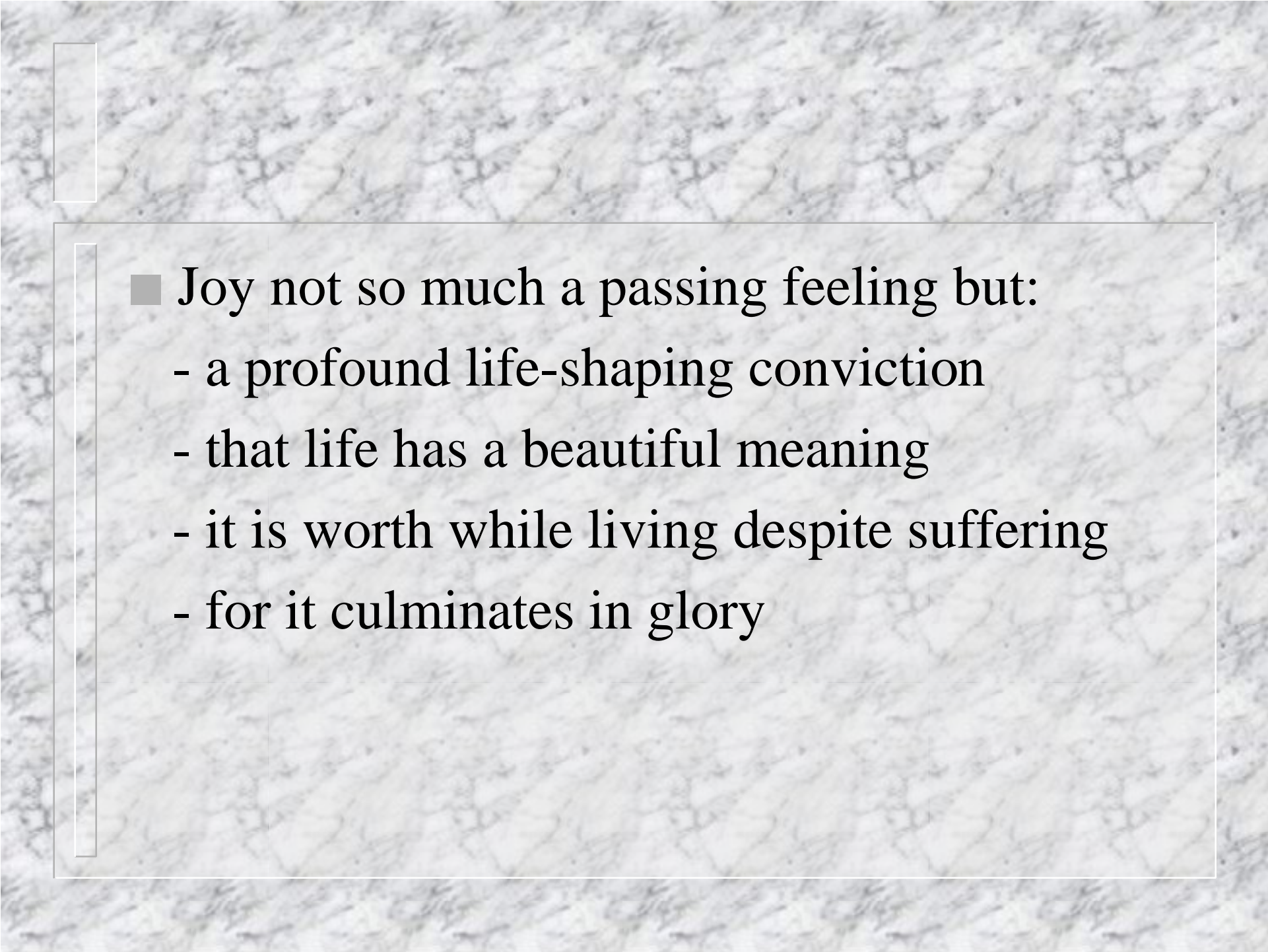


- 
- A committed couple can re-create and retell the story of Adam and Eve:
    - choosing obedience
    - dismissing the serpent
    - learning to restore trust
    - healing the divisions between each other and in their love

■ learning together to appreciate God's gifts:

- first creation *ex nihilo* (love from once not knowing one another)
- accepting the uniqueness of the chosen one
- creation of a third (a couple, child, new community, new history)
- doing this in the presence of suffering and death in the power of Christ's cross



- 
- Joy not so much a passing feeling but:
    - a profound life-shaping conviction
    - that life has a beautiful meaning
    - it is worth while living despite suffering
    - for it culminates in glory

