

Joy was born in New York City in 1915. Her parents were Jews who had come to America from eastern Europe in their childhood. Her father and mother had abandoned Judaism. Joy declared herself an atheist at the age of eight after reading H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*.

In a few years, she recalled, I had rejected all morality as a pipe dream. If life had no meaning, what was there to live for except pleasure. Luckily for me, my preferred pleasure happened to be reading or I hadn't been able to stay out of hot water as well as I did.

If she had any philosophy in childhood it was in American prosperity, but that faith was destroyed by the depression. By 1930 she believed in nothing. Men, she said, are only apes; love, art and altruism are only sex; the universe is only matter; matter is only energy.

Yet, she was a poet. In her verse she asked whether life was really no more than just a matter of satisfying one's appetites.

Come now all Americans  
Kiss and accept your city  
The harsh mother, New York  
The clamor, the sweat,

...

This is New York, our city  
A kind place to live in  
Bountiful, our city  
Envied by the world and  
By the young in lonely places.

We have the bright lights  
The bridges, the Yankee Stadium.  
And if we're not contented,  
Then we should be.

To put this in prose: If we are only matter, matter only, then matter alone should satisfy us. Alas, there is no end to our discontent. For the committed secular materialist, the desire for more is a plague. The irrepressible disquiet is evidence of merely the insatiable perversity of aimless appetite.

This bleak materialism is not the only way to read the insufficiency of every pleasure to satisfy the spirit within us. It may be read as evidence of our inclination toward an infinite, transcendent source of fulfillment. At the heart of all of us is a center that is a point of

intersection where our deepest desires and God's desiring in us meet and are found to coincide.

Desire is the key to the spiritual journey. We can believe our desire is aimless and despair of ever knowing fulfillment. Or, we can trust our desire is calling us to never settle for less than is worthy of us.

Thomas wants to empirically authenticate claims of Jesus' palpable presence. "I will not believe until I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side." What is often overlooked in the telling of this story is the fact that Jesus honored Thomas' request. Jesus offers himself to Thomas.

"Do not doubt but believe" is a mistranslation of the text. It should read, "Do not be unbelieving, but believe." Or better, "Cease to be faithless, but be faithful instead."

This is the only occurrence of this pair of adjectives (faithless/faithful) in the Gospel of John, and their contrast is important. Jesus exhorts Thomas to move from a position of unbelief to belief. This story does not focus on doubt and skepticism. Doubt is common to both unbelief and belief.

Joy graduated from Hunter College and then from Columbia University with an MA in English Literature. She taught English in NY high schools. Her first book of poems won two awards and she quit teaching to write full time. She published a novel and wrote for Hollywood films.

She married, moved to upstate NY, and had two sons. Her husband had fought in the Spanish Civil War. He returned uninjured physically but in rough shape mentally. One day he called her from his NY City office to say he was having a nervous breakdown. He felt his mind going. He couldn't stay where he was and he couldn't bring himself to come home.

For hours, Joy tried frantically to find out what had happened to him. In the end she gave up and waited. "I put the babies to sleep. For the first time in my life, I felt helpless. For the first time my pride was forced to admit that I was not after all the master of my fate and the captain of my soul."

"All my defenses, the walls of arrogance and cocksureness and self-love behind which I hid from God went down momentarily and God came in. There was a person with me in the room, directly present to my consciousness, a person so real that all my previous life was by comparison mere shadow play."

"I understood that God had always been there and that since childhood I had been pouring half my energy into the task of keeping him out. My perception of God lasted perhaps half

a minute. When it was over I found myself on my knees, praying. I think I must have been the world's most astonished atheist."

We live in a moment in history when the division between two ways of seeing and understanding life are coming into sharper focus and ever increasing conflict. One way, the way Joy embraced in her youth, is faithless: "Nothing is true; everything is possible."

If nothing is true, you can't lie; if nothing is true, you can pretend your fantasy is reality. If everything is possible, you can slander, defame and vilify the other—those who are of a different race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity—with impunity. If everything is possible, you can rape, pillage, and bomb your neighbor into oblivion and call it liberation.

The second way, the way Joy embraced following her experience of God's gracious self-disclosure, is faithful. It is the way of Thomas who was unwilling to give his life in the service of a lie, and encountered the reality of the One who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The faithful honor their natural and irrepressible desire to know the truth and discover, however momentarily, the infinitely desirable, ungraspable and unforgettable joy of knowing the reality in whom they live and move and have their being in every moment.

The end of the faithless way is death. The end of the faithful way is the ever fuller realization of the ever increasing desire to "see face to face," and thus to "know fully" as we are "fully known."