

Have you played this game? It's called, Ha Ha game. Youth groups play this game. Kids lay down on their back, with head resting on another's stomach, in the staggered manner. The first one says, "Ha." The second one says, "Ha ha." The third says, "Ha ha ha," and so forth. Each time the person before you says, "Ha," your head bobs up and down. Soon, the whole group of kids erupts in uncontrollable laughter like a wild fire, and every one is now rolling on the floor.

God created we human beings in such a way that our emotions are contagious. If some one smiles at you, you feel like smiling back. If some one frowns at you, you feel like frowning back. If a group of people suddenly laugh out heartily, then we want to find out why they are laughing, and we want to become part of that mirth.

Doesn't your mouth open half way already, as if you are ready to laugh out loud, when you see your friends laughing? Aren't

you ready to burst out in laughter, as you smilingly ask, "Hey, what's going on?" If you walked into a room, and everyone is happy and dancing, don't you feel like joining them?

When one of our beloved finally achieves something that is worthy, we all feel that excitement and share the outpouring of the emotions. And when we see those who suffer from injustice, we too feel the pain, and share the anger against those who practice it, and we are moved to stand with those who are suffering.

Yes, God created us human beings that way, to be together through happiness and through sadness. The fact that we can share the joys and tears with one another is a *gift* to our lives. Life becomes abundantly fulfilling, when we share the joy and laugh together. Life becomes profoundly meaningful, when we are committed to bear one another's burden, to partake of the pain. If sharing of laughter makes our lives livable, then

partaking of pain—even unto the point of death—strengthens our relationships.

This mutual commitment to the togetherness fills you with the courage and strength to go on, in the face of any challenges to your life, and it removes all fear and insecurity from you. You know that you are committed to give your life for the others, and you know that the others will do the same for you. This togetherness is perhaps the strongest bond in the human relationship. It is indeed one of the greatest spiritual blessings, and is the gift God bestows onto us.

We discover this gift of being together in the relationships in our friendship, in our family, in our faith community, and in our nation. If we never found this "togetherness" in our relationships, then we might be missing something that is precious, a life experience that makes life more abundant.

Now, we turn our attention to the stories in the Bible. One story is

about a family of a poor widow and her son. God had sent Prophet Elijah to Sidon during the time of great famine, so that he might survive it. Once he got there, he found out that widow was about to eat the last meal with her son, and wait for the death by starvation. It was a hopeless situation not only for the widow, but also for Elijah: didn't God promise him that she would take care of him?

But Elijah did not even flinch. He told her, instead, that the last scrap of food will not run out. And it did not. Then the widow's son died. With her only son gone, what hope does she have to go on? Again, it was a hopeless situation for the widow. She blamed Elijah for her son's death. Elijah asked for the body, and prayed. God answered his prayer, and the boy came back to life.

The other story is about a grieving family of a random person, whose body was being carried out in a funeral procession. As Jesus came near

the town of Nain, the body of the only son of a widow was being carried out, surrounded by a large crowd from the town. Jesus felt compassion for the widow, and said to her: "Do not weep." Then Jesus stopped the bier, and commanded the dead man to rise. Then the dead man rose, and began to speak.

Prophet Elijah felt the compassion for the widow and her son. Jesus felt the same compassion for the widow and her dead son. The compassion of the prophet moved God to bring the son back to life. The compassion of Jesus moved God to intervene in the course of people's lives. The compassion we have for people will also move God on their behalf. Jesus taught us to be compassionate, because Jesus knew that God responds to our compassion.

We are created in God's image, and that means we feel joys and pains just as God feels our joys and our pains. God is joyful, when we are joyful, and God is

sad when we are sad. Our God is a compassionate God.

Are we grateful today for the services our members provided in Jesus' name? God feels our thankfulness. Are we joyful, because our children are graduating and moving to the next level of growing? God shares our joy. God wants to participate in our lives. God want to be part of our togetherness.

As we lift up our thanksgiving and praise for the services our members have provided, know that God is glad to be part of our togetherness. As we lift up thanksgiving and praise for the achievements and growth our children have accomplished, know that God is happy to have been part of our lives.

When people experience God in their lives, they respond. The widow confessed that the words prophet Elijah speaks are true and from God. The large crowd of the people of the town all glorified God, and recognized

that Jesus was the prophet sent by God.

Do you believe our God hears our prayers and cares about our plights? Our God is a compassionate God. Our God wants to join in our celebrations, and partake in our struggles. Our God laughs with us when we laugh, cries with us, when we cry. Our God wants to share life with us, and be included in our togetherness. Won't you invite God into your life today, and let God be part of your togetherness?

God does not need our flattery to feel recognized and glorified. Would you feel important and accomplished, only when others heap on you praises and other good words? If you are, then, you must be either rich or famous.

But God is not that shallow. If you constantly need your self-esteem boosted by flattery and praise, then you have a low sense of self-worth. God does not really need our praise or recognition. Think about it: we

cannot really add glory to our God, any more than add with our flashlights more brightness to the sunlight.

Even so, I am certain God would appreciate our effort. I believe that God would prefer to have us save our batteries, however, and have us use that energy on something else—like on being compassionate with one another. I believe that God would feel glorified, if we lived in togetherness, in our devotion to God with compassion for one another.

Glory is not what God needs. What God needs is our selfless devotion to God and abundant compassion for one another. God wants us to live in togetherness with one another. And God wants to be part of that togetherness, all the days of our lives.