

## Word of the month Happy

**A**s October morphs into November, this word looms large in the daily liturgy. The climax is on All Saints Day, when we get it nine times in the Beatitudes. But Paul uses it twice the day before, and it's there in the Psalm a couple of days before that ("Happy indeed is the man ..."). Then we get it again in Luke on the 3rd, Paul on the 4th, and a slew of Psalm responses: "Happy the man ..." on the 7th and 14th, "He is happy..." on the 12th), and then the merciful relief of an inclusive pronoun on the 13th: "They are happy who follow God's law".

Things are soon to get happier, of course, with Happy Christmas, Happy Holidays, Happy New Year, and – as my kids used to wish Jesus on the 25th of December – Happy Birthday.

But what impresses me most about the modern use of happy is the remarkable range of settings in which it is used. Most obviously for a joyful event: the "happy couple" have a "happy day", and maybe later a "happy event". If things are going well, we talk about "happy campers", "happy bunnies", "happy landings", and running a "happy ship". Pubs have "happy hours".

We toast people with "happy days".



GETTY

### An image of happiness?

We wish people "many happy returns", or – a usage that grew in the last century – "many happies". Some people take "happy pills". We like people in fairy stories to be "happy ever after". And it's not just people. We talk about plants being "happy" if they're doing well.

We like to evaluate our degree of happiness. How would you fill the blank in "We were as happy as ---"? Traditional

comparisons involve all sorts of animals (larks, lambs, clams, pigs in muck ...) and people (princes, kings, sandboys ...). We can be "happy as the day is long", or the intriguing "happy as Larry". Who was Larry? Opinions vary, but the idiom is early recorded in the 1890s in New Zealand as a newspaper headline, referring to an undefeated Australian boxer called Larry Foley.

The southern hemisphere seems also to be responsible for the arrival of "happy-clappy", from the 1980s, popular at first especially in Australia and South Africa to describe – usually negatively – enthusiastic participation in worship.

And we like stories to have "happy endings". Or even newspaper articles. So here's a selection of delightful similes from poets and other writers to finish with: "happy as a sunflower", "... as sunlight", "... as a wave", "... as a Sunday in Paris".

But a prize must surely go to Wordsworth's "happy as a child". Or perhaps, for the *Herald*, the Victorian poet Philip James Bailey's "happy as heaven", and Irish novelist George Moore's "happy as a priest at a wedding".

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