

**THE
THIRD** **BOOK OF**
CATHOLIC
JOKES

GENTLE HUMOR ABOUT AGING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Deacon Tom Sheridan

Foreword by Father James Martin, SJ

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PUBLICATIONS

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FOREWORD

by Father James Martin, SJ



Laughter is an underappreciated virtue in the Christian spiritual life. Too many well-meaning and otherwise thoughtful believers equate being religious with being deadly serious. But, as the saying goes, when you're deadly serious you're probably seriously dead.

It's not clear how the idea that laughing is somehow "anti-religious" gained currency in Christian circles, but it may go back to the fact that there are no recorded instances in the Gospels of Jesus laughing. But Jesus *must* have laughed. Anyone who told clever parables and amusing stories, and who put up with his rather exasperating band of disciples, must have had a well-developed sense of humor.

One of my favorite little "proofs" for this belief is the story of Nathanael. In the Gospel of John (1:43-51) there's a wonderful little narrative in which Jesus decides to go to Galilee, where he meets up with a man named Philip and says to him, "Follow me." Later, Philip meets up with his friend Nathanael, and shares some surprising news. He tells his friend that he has found the Messiah. At the end of what must have been a breathless and excited conversation, Philip announces that the Messiah is from Nazareth.

Nathanael, who was apparently a difficult man to impress, says blandly, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Though we often overlook the widespread humor in the Bible,

Nathanael's quip is clearly a joke about the small town of Nazareth. Some Scripture scholars say that at the time, Jesus's hometown was a backwater village with as few as fifty families. It's like saying, "Oh really? Nazareth? You're kidding, right?"

Later Jesus meets up with the fellow who made light of his hometown. And what does he say in response? You might expect the dour, grumpy, depressed Jesus of popular imagination, the "Man of Sorrows," to say in solemn tones, "Make not fun of the town of Nazareth!" Or, "Woe to you who mock the poor town of Nazareth!"

But that's not what he says at all. Instead he says, with almost palpable joy, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" In other words, now *here's* a guy I can trust!

That little story shows three things. First, and most importantly, Jesus could appreciate a joke. It's one of many indications that he must have had a sense of humor. But let's look at it somewhat more theologically. If we believe that Jesus was fully divine and fully human (which we do believe), we must accept the fact that he laughed. For laughter is an essential part of a full, healthy and whole emotional life, an essential requirement for a "fully human" person.

The second thing that story demonstrates is that Nathanael obviously had a delicious sense of humor. In other words, one of the original apostles knew how to tell a joke and laugh a little.

Third, the evangelist (the fellow who wrote the Gospel, in this case St. John) must have had a sense of humor as well. After all, rather than expunging that witty dig at Nazareth, he preserved that little joke for all eternity.

So this little story shows that Jesus laughed; one of the apostles

had a sense of humor; and St. John appreciated a funny story.

We forget these things at our peril. Laughter helps us to be human. Laughing at our own foibles reminds us not to take ourselves with such deadly seriousness. Laughter puts things in perspective: that's why so many of the saints laughed. St. Philip Neri, the 16th-century Italian saint, was known specifically for his sense of humor, and kept a sign above his door that read, "The House of Christian Mirth."

That's why *The Third Book of Catholic Jokes: Gentle Humor about Aging and Relationships* is so welcome. Any opportunity for us to laugh as Catholics, and to laugh at ourselves, is welcome. So read Deacon Tom Sheridan's wonderful new collection, and have a laugh – for God's sake. Literally.

INTRODUCTION



What is “Catholic humor?” That’s a question I’ve been asked more than a few times because of the popularity of the two previous books in this series.

Indeed. What makes a joke “Catholic?” Is it subject matter? Or the characters? Or a bit of “inside” humor? Perhaps it’s a little historical twist, or poking fun at a church authority figure or at ourselves?

Well, how about all of the above? And a lot more, actually.

Some people can really deliver a joke, especially some of my friends in sales and one or two clergy I’ve met, but I’ve never been a great joke-teller. Even after researching, discovering, and rewriting thousands of humorous bits for these books, I still sometimes stumble when telling one. I prefer stories from life, stories that are connected to the way we live, stories with that twist and a bit of the old-standby, irony.

But wait a minute. That’s what jokes are: stories from life that have been re-framed and condensed into nuggets of humor.

Often, what make them identifiably “Catholic” are the traditions, the sensitivities, and the sensibilities of the reader. While many of the jokes in this book involve all the usual suspects, figures such as deacons, priests, and bishops and even the occasional parish council president or music minister and the like, it’s the human situation behind the words that will connect us to the humor.

The Catholic character of a joke isn't always obvious. It shouldn't need to be. Catholics are funny when they're just being people. What makes a joke Catholic *can* be something as simple as that you wouldn't mind telling it to your 29-year-old pastor (now *that's* funny)...or your 86-year-old mother.

This volume meets that criterion. Growing older and maintaining relationships: What better opportunity is there to explore the humor that resides in life from a Catholic perspective? Here are identifiably Catholic jokes poking gentle fun at the people, practices, and premises that reflect who we are as a faith community with deep spiritual and historical roots. And, yes, there are Catholic clichés, because clichés flow from life and always have a ring of truth to them. And, yes, there are just plain old jokes about people and their foibles, jokes that see the humor in just being human – without being offensive or off-color. Jokes for Catholics and jokes about Catholics.

Inside this two-part book are jokes that reflect the humorous side of our relationships with one another and the comical perspective that comes with getting older. Enjoy them, share them with one another, and learn from them not to take yourself too seriously. As we Catholics say every Ash Wednesday, all we are is dust, and unto dust we shall return. In the meantime, we can share a good laugh.

Deacon Tom Sheridan
Ocala, Florida
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Laughter won't keep us from getting older, but it'll sure ease the pain.

There's an old and much-used bit of advice that says old age isn't for sissies. Surely there are travails as well as triumphs in aging, but getting older certainly beats the alternative!

The first time I knew I was an old guy – make that “mature American” – was when a young woman offered me her seat on a bus. I was on my way home from work at the Archdiocese of Chicago. Hey, I wasn't old; I hadn't even begun to think about retirement yet.

I turned her down, of course. But very nicely. Then I went home and looked in the mirror. The cliché is true: Inside every older person is a younger one wondering what just happened.

Several months later, another young woman offered me her seat on the same bus. I must have been tired, so I took it. That's why after I retired I stopped taking buses altogether. Bad for the ego.

Yes, the following jokes make fun of aspects of growing older, but it's when we lose our sense of humor and the ability to laugh at ourselves and even our growing frailties that we really begin to go downhill.

It takes courage, humility, and maturity to laugh at ourselves. So let's get to it.

**We don't stop laughing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop laughing.**

An elderly couple is lying in bed one morning, having just awakened from a good night's sleep. He takes her hand and she responds, "Don't touch me. Call Father Bob. I want him to do the funeral."

"Why?" he asks.

She answers back, "Because I'm dead."

The husband says to her, "What are you talking about? We're both lying here in bed together and talking to one another."

The wife says, "No, I'm definitely dead."

Her husband insists, "You're not dead and I'm not calling Father Bob. What in the world makes you think you're dead?"

His wife answers, "Because I woke up this morning and nothing hurts!"

"Where is my Sunday paper?" demanded the little old lady calling the newspaper office.

"Madam," said the customer service representative, "today is Saturday. The Sunday paper will not be delivered until tomorrow, on Sunday."

There was quite a long pause on the other end of the phone, and the little old lady muttered meekly, "So that's why so few people were at Mass this morning."

