

OH, BROTHER!

Belly Laughs for Good-Humored Catholics



BROTHER LOUGHLAN SOFIELD, ST

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FOREWORD HO!

Laughter has been called the best medicine and a balm for the soul, as important as love, the universal language, and something only humans can do.

Funny, isn't it, that a book of jokes can be important for our well-being? Scientists and counselors tell us that it's good for body and mind to experience a belly laugh or a wry comment on a regular basis.

Others wise in spiritual matters state that God gave us a sense of humor because it's good for our souls as well.

Dorothy Day speaks eloquently of the discipline of gratitude, but I'm sure Dorothy loved a good laugh as much as any of us. I find it hard to be grateful without laughing. The sheer fact that God created us—with our foibles as well as our gifts—should make us grin from ear to ear with delight and gratitude.

I pray this book will give you the same “heavenly” reward it has already given me.

Helen Osman
Secretary of Communications
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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago I attended my first Broadway play entitled *The Subject Was Roses* by Frank Gilroy. I remember sitting in the upper balcony, mesmerized by Gilroy's mastery of language. As I listened to the dialog, I was completely absorbed and could feel the tension building within me. I began to notice that when the tension built to a point where it was beginning to be overpowering, one of the actors would deliver a humorous line. The laughter released the pressure, and I was again able to focus on the play. I believe that was the day I learned the power of humor and laughter.

I have had the privilege of ministering in almost three hundred dioceses on six continents. What I learned that day on Broadway has had a strong impact on my presentations. Often the material I am covering is extremely intense. I have learned that a little humor or a joke can defuse the intensity and allow participants to absorb more of the heavy material.

St. John Paul II once commented that when you look through the scriptures, there are two elements characteristic of Jesus: healing and forgiveness. It is my conviction that I am able to be a disciple of healing when I can bring laughter, joy, and humor into the lives of those who experience great pain and suffering. Laughter is the medicine which provides spiritual and emotional healing to those who suffer. Humor and laughter are powerful tools that break down barriers and serve as the universal humanizer of us all.

In his first apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis emphasizes the need for joy in the Christian life. He dismisses those who are joyless and lacking in humor when he says,

“Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral.” He also reminds us that we are called to share our joy because the Church grows “by attraction.” Throughout his exhortation, Pope Francis evokes great imagery, for example: “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.” The true evangelizer, he reminds us, reflects joy, laughter, and happiness.

Robert Ellsberg, in *The Saints’ Guide to Happiness* (New York: North Point Press, 2003, xi), says that the saints “in general...were renowned for their balance and good humor...and their ability to find joy in all things.”

Once when working in the Holy Land (I presume you all realize that the Holy Land is Ireland), I was at a prayer service where the leader showed a video that revealed Jesus laughing loudly and raucously as he playfully rolled on the ground with children. I remember my immediate reaction: “Why don’t we see more of that?” Too often Jesus is presented as a super stoic, seemingly devoid of joy and yet in the Gospel of John, we are reminded of the very reason for which he has come, “I have come that you may have life and have it to the fullest” (John 10:10). Life and joy and laughter are related. They may even be synonymous.

A large number of the jokes included in this book are actually true stories—funny, delightful, and sometimes poignant incidents that have happened to me and to friends. The remaining jokes are ones that I have heard during my lifetime. Their authorship is unknown, and I simply thank anyone who sees one of his or her jokes in this book. It is impossible to track down their initial authorship.

One final thought. You don’t stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing.

Brother Loughlan Sofield, ST

For several evenings at bedtime, Mrs. Smith had been teaching the Lord's Prayer to her three-year-old daughter, Veronica. Mrs. Smith would recite the prayer, one line at a time, and Veronica would faithfully repeat the words.

Finally, Veronica decided to go solo. She carefully enunciated each word, until she got to the last phrase. "Lead us not into temptation," she concluded, "but deliver us from email."

"Amen," said her mom.

A mother had three sons, two of the boys belonging to the same religious community.

She was fond of confusing people by saying, "I have three sons, and two of them are brothers."

Brother Loughlan was conducting a program for diocesan pastoral leaders. Trying to cover a massive amount of material in a rather short period of time, he was visibly frustrated. "I feel like a mosquito in a nudist colony," he declared. "Where do I begin?"

The parish custodian was wiped out at the end of one horrendous winter day. Hoping to reduce some of his stress, he emailed the weather anchor at one of the local TV stations. "Just for the record," he wrote, "I have just finished shoveling six inches of your 'partly cloudy.'"

She emailed him back, "Wait until you see my 'light flurries' tonight."

Lyle and Lucy, an elderly couple from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, spent their later years in a senior living facility. One day Lucy sent her husband to the dining hall to get her some ice cream. Knowing he was getting more and more forgetful, she demanded he make a list. "I want a strawberry sundae with two scoops of ice cream," she said.

Just as Lyle was getting ready to leave, Lucy called him back and added, "And I want chocolate syrup and lots of whipped cream. Now write that all down."

Obediently, Lyle wrote it all down.

When Lyle returned an hour later, he handed Lucy a tray with scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, and coffee.

"What is this?" she scolded. "Where's the toast?"

An elderly woman walked into St. Veronica's for the 10 a.m. Mass. The young usher greeted her at the door and asked her where she'd like to sit.

When she told him she'd like to sit in the front row, he walked her down the aisle. When they got there he whispered, "I wouldn't recommend this."

"Why not?" she asked.

"The pastor is really boring," he replied.

"Do you know who I am?" the woman asked.

"No," he said.

"I'm the pastor's mother."

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No," she said. "Should I?"

"Not at all," he said before making a beeline for the back of church.

The pastoral associate told one of her parishioners that she had been praying for patience and understanding with her pastor but recently had discontinued her prayer. She was afraid God might grant it.

Notre Dame High School for Boys was having its annual picnic.

Three students were walking near the lake when they heard someone shouting for help. Not far away they saw the local mayor, an unpopular leader who was against parochial schools, splashing around in the middle of the lake. He was close to drowning. All three boys jumped in the water to save him.

When they were successfully back on land, the mayor thanked them profusely and asked if there was anything that he could do for them.

The first said he would like an appointment to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. The mayor promised him that he would try to arrange that.

The second asked for an appointment to West Point. The mayor said he would try to grant that wish as well.

The mayor turned to the third young man and asked if he had a request. "Yes," he said, "I would like to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery."

Surprised, the mayor asked why a man so young would be making such a strange request.

"Because," the student responded, "when the principal finds out I saved your life, he's going to kill me."

After Sunday Mass, a parishioner stopped to talk with Deacon Steve. "Your homily reminded me of the Washington monument," he said. "It took a long time to get to the point!"

An elderly brother with a reputation for being less than zealous reported to his hardworking superior.

"I'd like to retire," the brother said.

Incredulous, the superior inquired, "From what?"

"I've got some good news," Mother Superior announced to her community. "Sister Rita is recovering so well from her heart surgery that the doctor says she can begin working one day a week."

One of the sisters turned to the sister closest to her and said, "That means they just cut Mother Superior's work load in half."

At the beginning of Mass, Father Juan, realizing someone might notice, announced that he had cut his neck. While shaving that morning, he explained, he had been concentrating on his homily.

After Mass one of his parishioners shook the priest's hand, saying with all seriousness, "Next time, Father, think about your neck and cut your talk."

During a rather long and boring homily at a children's Mass, Sister Janet, the principal, observed Little Jonnie, a small, first-grade boy, standing up in his front-row pew and talking with the children in the row behind him. Sister waved at him, trying to communicate to him that his behavior was inappropriate, but Little Jonnie simply smiled at her and waved back.

Annoyed, the principal turned to Little Janie sitting next to her and instructed her, "Go and tell him to stop talking and sit down."

Obediently, the girl walked up the side aisle, past the front row, and into the sanctuary, where she whispered in the priest's ear, "Sister said to stop talking and sit down."

The priest, a graduate of Catholic grade school, immediately sat down and shut up.

At a parish woman's retreat, participants shared their own gifts and then identified the gifts of the other members of their small group.

One woman was the last one to share in her small group of women. The others in the group were effusive, recounting all the gifts they saw in her.

Finally, the woman responded, "Say, would one of you mind giving my husband a quick call and let him know I'm too good for him?"

Liz, the religious education director, hung a banner in her office that read, "The truth will set you free. But first it will make you miserable."