

THE BOOK OF CATHOLIC JOKES

Deacon Tom Sheridan
Foreword by *Father Gregory Sakowicz*

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FOREWORD

by Father Gregory Sakowicz



One time Groucho Marx stepped off a train in New York City and was greeted by a priest. “I want to thank you, Groucho, for all the joy and laughter you have brought into people’s lives,” the priest proclaimed.

“And I want to thank you, Father,” Groucho replied, “for all the joy and laughter you have taken out of people’s lives.”

This is a “Catholic” joke, and it is funny. Why shouldn’t religion—in this case the Catholic faith—celebrate the humor that is innate in the human condition? Why should Catholicism consider itself too pious to mine the rich vein of laughter that is surely a unique and irreplaceable gift of a God who loves all human beings, despite our foibles and shortcomings and silliness?

A Catholic schoolteacher walks into her empty classroom one morning to find a note placed neatly upon her desk. The note reads simply: “If you are feeling okay today, please notify your face.”

God must think the ability to make a joke is pretty special. After all, he apparently reserved this gift to us humans. Among all the creatures God has placed on the earth, only we humans concoct jokes that can bring tears of laughter to our eyes. No other creature seems to see the wry humor behind a seemingly innocent comment or ob-

servation. Indeed, no other creature has the ability to make others laugh, chortle, cackle, chuckle, guffaw, giggle, snicker, snigger, snort or titter.

Two nuns are running away from a bear, who is gaining on them. "Do you think we'll be able to outrun him, Sister?" one of the nuns asks the other.

"I don't have to outrun him, Sister. I only have to outrun you," said the other nun.

They say it takes only fifteen muscles in our face to laugh, but it takes some seventy muscles to frown. This should give us some hint what the Creator has in mind for us most of the time. As the pastor of a wonderful Chicago parish, I find humor is a way of opening a window to my congregation's hearts and souls. Isn't that what Jesus did with his parables? Many were ironic and humorous comments on how we humans take ourselves too seriously and the ends we will go to get our own way. For example, he compared rich people to camels trying to get through the eye of a needle. He told the story of a relentless widow who simply wore down a judge until he ruled in her favor. He offered the ridiculous image of a gardener trying to spread manure around a dead fig tree in an attempt to get it to bear fruit. Yet these were all images of the kingdom of God, which was Jesus' main message. Apparently he thought that humor was an appropriate vehicle for religious instruction, so why should we be afraid of it?

A deacon and his wife invited their elderly pastor for Sunday dinner. While the couple was in the kitchen preparing the meal, the priest asked their son what they were having to eat.

"Goat," the little boy replied.

"Goat?" asked the startled man of the cloth. "Are you sure about that?"

"Yep," said the youngster. "I heard Dad say to Mom before you came, 'Today is as good as any to have the old goat for dinner.'"

Humor is a learned experience. It starts when a little baby understands that hiding our face behind our hands and then saying "peek-a-boo" is funny, and it ends when we learn to kid one another about how old we are getting. One of the greatest sources of humor can be religion, for religion offers us an opportunity to laugh at ourselves at our most serious, and Jesus taught us that we shouldn't take ourselves all that seriously. "Unless you become like little children," he said, "you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

After receiving a beautiful haircut, a doctor asks the barber, "How much do I owe you?"

"Oh, I never charge a doctor," the barber replies. "You all do such good, important work."

The next morning, the barber arrives at his shop and finds a thank you note and a bottle of wine on his doorstep from the doctor.

Later that day, a police officer walks into the same barbershop. After a beautiful haircut, the police officer asks the barber, "How much do I owe you?"

"Oh, I never charge a police officer," the barber replies. "You all do such good, important work."

The next morning, the barber arrives at his shop and finds a thank you note and a box of candy on his doorstep from the police officer.

Later that day, a priest walks into the same barbershop. After a beautiful haircut, the priest asks the barber, "How much do I owe you?"

"Oh, I never charge a priest," the barber replies. "You all do such good, important work."

The next morning, the barber arrives at his shop and finds twelve priests on his doorstep.

I applaud my friend and colleague Tom Sheridan for assembling some very funny jokes (although sometimes they hit pretty close to home). This is a book of Catholic jokes because they are about Catholics or about Catholic practices, beliefs or customs. They reflect the Catholic incarnational sensibility that God is present in the everyday occurrences of daily life. But they are also "catholic" because they are for and about everyone, which is what "catholic" really means. Enjoy them, and don't be embarrassed to laugh out loud. Laughter is music for the soul!



ABOUT THESE JOKES



Catholic jokes fall into a couple of categories. Some are self-deprecating and let us laugh a little at ourselves. Others point out the human foibles of a supernatural church. Still others carry a little bit of irreverence or impiety. The rest are just plain funny, keying on some of the apparent absurdities of life.

Catholic humor is rich and varied. Some of the jokes in this book are no doubt familiar. Many you may never have heard before. Others have been adapted from what were originally secular or not specifically Catholic jokes. Though they've been collected from many sources, these jokes by no means form an exhaustive list of how we laugh at ourselves.

The Internet has made joke-sharing an art form. These jokes come from my own collection of jokes, from contributions of friends and colleagues, and from various websites and other publications. It's almost impossible to credit the origin of a specific joke—most have been circulation and evolving for years or even decades. Very few jokes have only a single source, and I believe these to be in the public domain. If authorship of a copyrighted joke has not been properly noted, please let the editors know and it will be corrected in subsequent editions.

Finally, we know there are hundreds or even thousands more good Catholic jokes. Everyone likely has a favorite. If yours is not included in this collection, and you'd like to submit one (or several) for possible inclusion in a followup edition, please write:

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FAITH CAN BE FUNNY



A priest, a minister and a rabbi walk into a bar. The bartender is washing glasses. He looks up and says, "What is this, a joke?"

Actually, yes. That little one-liner is a pretty good example of how humor, perhaps especially religious humor, works. Humor takes an ordinary experience and twists it until it squeezes out a drop of laughter. Very often that drop turns into a gusher.

And sometimes there's even a dollop of wisdom.

Not all jokes are uproariously funny, you know. Many work with laughter on one hand, but offer a twist that gets us thinking.

One day a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to tell God that they were done with him.

The scientist walked up to God and said, "We've decided we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so why don't you just go and get lost."

God listened patiently and said, "Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest." The scientist replied, "Now you're talking! OK!"

God added, "We'll do it just like I did back in the old days."

"No problem," said the scientist, and bent down to grab a handful of dirt.

"No, no, no," said God. "Go get your own dirt!"

Or ...

Did you hear about the man standing before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates waiting to get into heaven? St. Peter asks what he did in life.

Proudly, the man says, "I was the president of a major HMO."

"In that case," St. Peter says, "you can come in for three days. Then you'll have to go to hell."

Or ...

Before celebrating a baptism, the deacon approached the young father and said solemnly, "Baptism is a serious step. Are you sure you're prepared for it?"

"I think so," the man replied. "My wife has made appetizers and we have a caterer coming to provide plenty of cookies and cakes for our guests."

"I don't mean that," the deacon said. "I mean, are you prepared spiritually?"

"Oh, sure," came the reply. "I've got a keg of beer and a case of whiskey."

It would be a mistake, though, to take such jokes too seriously. Still, if our shared faith can't stand up to a little ribbing, maybe it's not strong enough.

Faith may be serious business, but so is faithful laughter, which



has been called the language of the soul. And, as one wag once reminded us, “Religion is too important to be taken seriously all the time.”

This book is hardly deep theology, and some of the jokes might even be a little lame. But remember, even lame laughter is far better than no laughter at all. Humor is an emotion that connects us, breaks down barriers, heals divisions and acknowledges the presence of a God who has touched humanity.

It echoes the great Teilhard de Chardin who enthusiastically said: “Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.”

Plunge on, dear reader. See how Jesus—and the faith he launched—has sometimes been mischaracterized as stern and grim-faced rather than one like us who appreciated the foibles and humor of life.

Then, enjoy the jokes and—for God’s sake—laugh!

There's the story of the pastor and his deacon who were volunteering as carpenters to fix roofs for needy parishioners.

The deacon was on a ladder nailing. Each time he reached into his nail pouch and pulled out a nail, he'd look at it, and either toss it over his shoulder or nail it into the roof.

The pastor watched for a while, puzzled. Then he couldn't stand it any longer and yelled up, "Why are you throwing away some of the nails?"

The deacon explained, "When I pull it out of my nail pouch, if it's pointed toward me I throw it away. If it's pointed toward the house, then I can use it safely!"

The pastor became very frustrated at this and shouted, "That's stupid! Don't throw away the nails that are pointed toward you! They're for the other side of the roof!"

A laywoman goes to the post office to buy stamps for Christmas cards.

"I'd like 100 stamps," she says.

"What denomination?" asks the clerk.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, has it really come to this?" complains the woman. "Well, OK, give me 50 Catholic, 10 Baptist, 20 Lutheran and 20 Presbyterian."