
Laugh Your Way To New Life

**A Lenten Meditation from the *Cathedral Times*
By Canon George Maxwell**

People in religious circles have not always found laughter to be so funny. It has often been frowned upon because it can involve the loss of self-control and the breaking of social rules. And, admittedly, we do sometimes wield it as a weapon.

Laughter can serve as a shield to put some distance between us and our fears. Pay attention the next time you are in a group and the emotional heat gets turned up a little. The conversation starts to make you feel uncomfortable, as if someone is shining a light in the dark closet where you keep the most revealing things about yourself. The most anxious person in the group will often crack a joke. Everyone laughs. The light switches off. The door to the closet closes. Crisis avoided.

Sometimes, of course, we need the protection. We need laughter to release the anguish and pain that is dammed up inside of us. And, we need laughter to remind us that tragedy is not going to get the final word.

Laughter can also be used as a sword to cut our enemies down to size. Against the powerful, it may be the only weapon that we have. When used to attack the powerless, though, it can be just another form of cruelty.

Pay attention the next time you sense that someone is being belittled just for entertainment. It might start to look like a scene you recognize. You might see taunting soldiers carrying a purple cloak and the crown of thorns. You might hear deriding passers-by shouting things like, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross." You might recognize mocking chief priests and scribes saying things like, "He saved others; he cannot save himself."

Joyful laughter, though, is at the center of the spiritual life.

It's not hard to see why this is true. It's hard to think of a good time that we have had with friends when we didn't laugh.

Pay attention the next time you find laughter unexpectedly connecting you to someone else: the irresistible cooing that gurgles out of a baby when you make just the right face; or the revealing chuckle that sneaks up on you when you hear a good country song title; or the infectious belly-laughter that erupts among friends in a spirited dinner table conversation.

This is what new life sounds like. It's a sign of the presence of God. And, it often reveals the truth in a way that we can take. It can give us the courage to be vulnerable, even create the space to confess some of our less favored emotions.

I realize that Lent is our time to walk with Jesus, to prepare for his resurrection and ascension by experiencing his death. And, we are all trying to take our disciplines seriously. Looking serious, though, is not the same thing as being serious.

Laughter has the ability to show us things as they really are, particularly things about ourselves that we would rather not see.

This is what Easter is about – the irresistible, revealing, infectious laughter that bursts into the world, shining light into the darkness, surprising us with joy, and lifting us up in hope.

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