

# Encouragement Encouragement

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## Humour... and Holiness

THE HOST APOSTOLATE  
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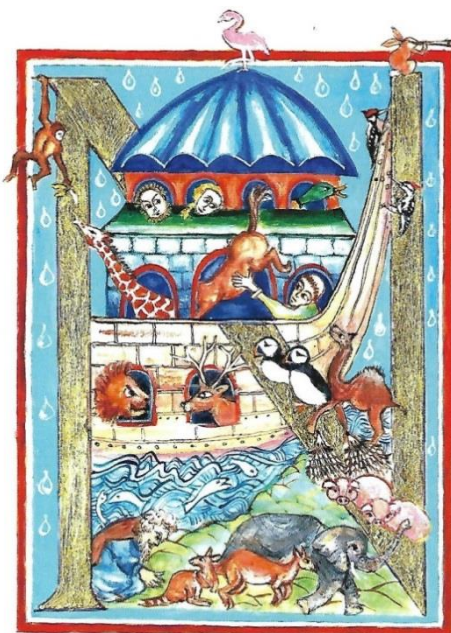
There is much to thank God about this July – Hopefully, at least for the time being the Pandemic has eased in many countries though not all and we have a vaccine that is at least effective in preventing serious illness or death. We are able to meet each other and visit family. A time perhaps to bring out those smiles and laughter a little more though never forgetting those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

Laughter is an important part of our expressive selves and an important part of living fully alive, as of course is smiling. Who can resist the laughter of children and the first sometimes hilarious gurgling of babies usually encouraged to produce more of the same? But I wonder if we ever consider it as part of the holiness of people.

St. Teresa of Avila spoke in an outright way about the kind of saintliness that produces a dour person. She said ‘from silly devotions and sour faced saints Good Lord deliver us’.

It is interesting to note that many great saints had a sense of humour – both laughing at things and often at themselves. Last month I received a newsletter from Stanbrook, Wass, North Yorkshire, a Benedictine Abbey, and sitting down to rest for a few minutes after a busy day I was attracted to Dame Julian’s calligraphic letters and especially the figure ‘N’ for Noah of course. As I looked at it more closely, I saw some ‘funny bits’ and done by a Benedictine sister. No sour faced person did these. I noticed a monkey feeding a giraffe some banana, I noticed a rabbit with a telescope on top of the roof, and someone having trouble pushing the cow through the window of the ark but what brought me much amusement were the woodpeckers pecking

away at the helm. There was of course the dromedary, and the lion looking at the somewhat benign deer with ferocious eyes, not usually close companions. There is much to ponder here and some interesting analogies. This brought much needed lightness to my day and a chance to share. The Holy Spirit must have a sense of humour too as the inspiration for July’s Encouragement came earlier than expected.



Used with permission of Dame Julian

I started to reflect on humour as a source of grace and a gift of healing. We know from science that laughter release endorphins which are the ‘happy chemicals’, perhaps telling us what the wise already know? But I thought of the many saints who learnt to smile through awful circumstances.

St. Don Bosco used to encourage the children to come for help, street beggars, by performing conjuring tricks, not to mention tight rope walking. St. Bernadette of Lourdes who was very ill at the time use to try to make her infirmarian laugh.

Once the infirmarian apologising that she was late, because the milk had boiled and over and run away receives a quip from Bernadette, ‘be quick and go run after it.’ It took the infirmarian a few minutes to realise the humour! It was also meant to say that she did not mind and not to worry about it.

Ven. Bishop Fulton Sheen once said: “*A divine sense of humour belongs to poets and saints because they have been richly endowed with a sense of the invisible and can look out upon the same phenomena that other mortals take seriously and see in them something of the Divine.*”

St Philip Neri is the patron Saint of Humour. Yes, there is one! ...which says something important.

“Please help me up to the ‘scaffold’... I can find my own way down!”

St Thomas More



He often laughed at himself and took great trouble to make himself look foolish to others for fear of others thinking well of him, against a backdrop of a growing reputation for holiness.

He sometimes wore clothes inside out or wrong shoes on wrong feet. He was also known for making others laugh.

Fr. Philip Fenton S. J. made this comment: "Sanctity is related to humour. That is why saints laugh at themselves, knowing that this universe is a stepping off place to their eternal goal, and that to take this world seriously is utter foolishness"

Another expression of this was from Bl. Titus Brandsma in a situation that few would find a place for humour, the concentration camp of Dachau. 'I don't need to weep or sigh. I even sing now and then, but not of course too loud.'

But what of the Master, Jesus himself. Underpinning many events of Scripture is a very great sense of humour. Clearly, we have no record stating that Jesus 'laughed' but beneath the many comments and situations this can be detected, even if it is only in irony. Often this was to teach a particular lesson or attitude. Much of the humour is subtle but would have made the listeners smile at very least. One example of this is the remark regarding riches and that 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven!' This must have raised some smiles. Jesus' 'humour' is often in the imagery that He presents. His parables and stories still bring a smile today. The widow who pestered the judge for justice, till he listened, if only to get rid of her, can make one think of situations today. Many children will keep asking parents for something until they finally get it, or a parent gives in for better or worse, just for some peace. Indeed, children's ability to do this is well known as is their ingenuity.

In the Acts of the Apostles humour continues. One of my favourites is St Peter being freed from Jail-walking out led by an Angel – walking through locked doors etc. and ONLY realising that he was out while walking down the street and the Angel having vanished from sight and that he was free...

He thought that he was dreaming!

We all know that expression 'laughter is the best medicine' I would add that it is food for the Spirit. Both smiling and laughing, especially at ourselves, can lift our spirits and remind us of our humanity. It reminds us that we are not perfect but learning to be joyful and holy, it 're-minds' us and changes our perspectives...

So share your stories of success and failure, mistakes and blessings, and laugh at both and be blessed.

Halina Holman.

### Pope Francis

**To a member of the Swiss Guard who told Pope Francis he could not sit down and rest while on duty because of orders from his captain to stand at attention for Pope Francis' protection: "Oh, is that so? Well, I'm the Pope and I am asking you to sit down." Pope Francis disappeared for a moment and then returned with a sandwich.**

Rome 2013

**'I pray for good humour' Pope Francis**

**A teacher ...** decided to have her young class memorise one of the most quoted passages in the Bible, Psalm 23. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the verse. Little Bobby was excited about the task, but he just couldn't remember the Psalm, he could barely get past the first line. On the day of the public recitation, Bobby was nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone, "The Lord is my shepherd and that's all I need to know!" Anon.

*"If someone had told me I would be Pope one day, I would have studied harder."* Pope John Paul I

### Feast Days in July

1<sup>st</sup> St. Oliver Plunkett

**3<sup>rd</sup> St. Thomas, Apostle**

**4<sup>th</sup> Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

5<sup>th</sup> St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria

6<sup>th</sup> St. Maria Goretti

**11<sup>th</sup> Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

14<sup>th</sup> St. Camillus de Lellis

15<sup>th</sup> St. Bonaventure

**16<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Mount Carmel**

**18<sup>th</sup> Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

21<sup>st</sup> St. Laurence of Brindisi

22<sup>nd</sup> St. Mary Magdalene

**23<sup>rd</sup> St. Bridget of Sweden, Patroness of Europe**

24<sup>th</sup> St. Charbel Mahklouf & Martyrs of Diocese 'H & N'

**25<sup>th</sup> Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

26<sup>th</sup> Ss. Anna & Joachim

29<sup>th</sup> St. Martha

30<sup>th</sup> St. Peter Chrysologus

31<sup>st</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola