

INTO YOUR HANDS | Archbishop Robert G. Casey

Become Like Children

What is the best remedy for us when we find ourselves overwhelmed by sadness, despair, or hopelessness? We have all heard it said, “Laughter is the best medicine.” We know from experience that sharing a good laugh or simply a smile can serve as a healing balm and restorative remedy to body, mind, and soul.

Years ago, I knew a priest who forbade smiling in church. He would continually remind his flock that celebrating the Mass was serious work and would scold those that he caught smiling. Fearful of appearing too joyful, the congregation soon found themselves growing more sullen and grim with each passing Sunday. Worried that a bad-tempered parish would do little to pass the faith onto the next generation, the parishioners reached out to the archbishop for help.

That priest needed to read the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which begins with Pope Francis reminding us, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.” A joyful Catholic cannot help but evangelize, becoming an instrument of God’s love and mercy for those who may be caught up in sin and sadness and seeking salvation.

Perhaps this is why Jesus calls us to become like children as we embrace the faith and put it into practice. Children possess an innate ability to laugh and to smile. We see this every day. Many of us have made a silly face to babies, knowing that we can easily coax a smile out of their cherubic little faces. Many of us can recall getting the giggles with someone and laughing until our bellies hurt. (I have some wonderful memories of my father quickly ushering me out of church during Mass because I had started giggling with one of my brothers or sisters!) Many of us, too, have

found ourselves lifted out of the depths of sadness or a sea of anger by choosing to look on the bright side of life rather than stewing in our sorrow.

Perhaps you have heard the Christian hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing?". Its lyrics challenge us to rise above the tumult and the strife that can so often overwhelm us in our daily labor. We are asked to hear "the real, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation." When we can hear the song of heaven, a song that lifts our hearts with the joy and promise of God's abiding presence, how can we keep from singing? Knowing that God is forever near to us, reaching out to us in our sin and our sadness and raising us up in new hope, we must sing. We cannot help but smile.

Jesus encourages us to be like children, embracing joy, finding happiness in our faith, and holding fast to an excitement for life. With renewed childlike wonder and innocence, we are invited to let go of the cynicism and pessimism that comes with age and heed the advice given to us in Proverbs 17:22, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine."

May we begin each day with the best medicine—a commitment to spend each waking moment seeking out laughter, being good-natured, and blessing one another with joy. May we listen each day for the lighthearted laughter and glorious giggles of children, so that we may find ourselves awakened to God's presence in our midst and take to heart that contagious laughter, allowing peace, love and joy to bring healing to us and to our world.