

Alleluia is the word of the day it seems! On your Mass leaflet are many instructions. Including to sing Alleluia! Also, when to stand, when to sit, and when to kneel. But nowhere on your leaflet, are we told when to **laugh**. In fact, during this homily is the ideal time to laugh during Mass, especially when Fr Michael makes valiant attempts at humour. But you mustn't laugh unless it comes naturally. No one can tell you when to laugh – and once you are laughing, it is hard to be told to stop – because then you're suffering from a fit of the giggles; like the hiccups, *the giggles* require a fright to snap out of them.

Untimely laughter aside; did you know that laughter can be holy, sometimes? Especially at the right time, during Easter time. Allow me to share with you the *Risus Paschalis*; Latin words meaning Paschal laughter, or Easter laughter. The *Risus Paschalis* of the 1600s, during the baroque era, used to be an opportunity for the priest to make everyone in the congregation laugh on Easter Sunday. The thinking was that Easter is the most joyful time of the Church's calendar, and that everyone should be overjoyed with the happy news that Jesus had triumphed over death itself, by rising from the dead. The Easter homily had to include a story that made people laugh, so that the church resounded with joyful laughter. Priests deliberately included amusing stories and jokes in their sermons. Unfortunately, some ministers took it too far, using risqué humour, rude gestures, or clown performances during Mass. Not to mention animal noises. In the end, the Pope at the time, Pope Clement X clamped down, prohibiting the *Risus Paschalis*; it got cancelled. So in humble obedience, I shan't be telling any jokes right now. And no laughter please; if it isn't baroque, don't fix it. Many of the joyful and ornate alleluias we've already enjoyed in this Mass are like laughter though; alleluia? alle-ha-ha!

And even if I did tell the best joke I could think of, nothing could be funnier than God's greatest joke of all time. The supreme joke God played on satan by raising Jesus from the dead. The Church Fathers saw Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate practical joke. A joke played by God on the devil: the triumph of life over death, of good over evil.

And whilst there are tragic situations in our world, the kind remembered on Red Wednesday, damaging and distressing wars going on, even the abiding scandal of the stations of the cross, remember one thing: Jesus always wins. No matter the evil in the world, Jesus has already won the victory to end all victories. His victory is over sin and death, victory over the devil. Jesus won the battle years ago. Any claim that evil is overcoming good in our world is laughable. Because Jesus won on the first Easter. Jesus always wins. Something to chuckle about with joy this Easter time.

It is unkind to laugh at our brothers and sisters around us, who have feelings and are doing their best. But laughing at the devil is fair game; because he is doing his worst and his feelings are frozen solid. There is still evil in the world, the defeated, stinking, rotting corpse of the evil one still lingers and will do so until the end of time. But the Risen, fragrant body of Jesus Christ is alive and well, he lives and reigns for ever and ever, alleluia! Be part of the living body of Jesus Christ this Easter in the Church. He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. Alleluia!

St Stephen the first Christian martyr knew this joy as he faced the enemy, who stoned him. Stephen had the last laugh as he saw heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. We heard it in the first reading. Evil brings death, Jesus brings life: choose Jesus this Easter. Stephen did. Jesus says: *the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*. That bread is the risen Jesus. Whilst the evil laughter of the wicked seems to resound, Jesus always wins. Nothing could be funnier. *Risus Paschalis* is in order. Easter Laughter. May we be overjoyed this Easter, and may laughter resound in our hearts. Jesus saves. He brings resurrection to you and to me. Believe in him. Have faith in Jesus. Glory to His name forever; Alleluia!

Let us pray:

*No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life
Life is naught without thee, aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conquerors, though they deathless love:
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.
Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory, thou e'er death hast won.
Amen. Alleluia!*