

Laughter

By Ed Allen

Do I laugh less, as I get older? Yes, and I laugh at different things than when I was younger. Also, when I was a young child I felt more glee - stimulated by a wonderful experience: a funny face, a surprise visitor, or running through the spray of a garden sprinkler.

As I began to reason, I tended to laugh at others' mishaps. It was vogue as exhibited in some favorite comics: Donald Duck, Goofy, Popeye, The Road Runner, Porky Pig, with the bashing and being bashed, but my hero always survived - Absurd! I remember when Goofy kicked the hat hiding the brick. The surprise, and the hurt. Mishaps of others can be very funny! And later, the person splashed by the car passing too closely through the mud puddle; or, the public speaker who blows his lines. The "wicked witch" laughed a lot, always at destructive acts. There are "good" jokes and there are "bad" Jokes. There are "good" laughs and "bad" laughs? "He who has the last laugh is he who wins after an apparent defeat."

We were instructed as children to laugh with, not at others. Is our reaction supportive or contemptuous? Laughter is a reaction caused by the absurd¹. The Writings say that many times there is contempt involved, and that laughter is an external reaction from which an internal is expressed. Also, laughter represents affection for the truth, or falsity, and affection for good does not come forth as laughter but as joy (AC 2072)². Sincere laughter is joy spilling over. Spiritual joy results from willing good (TCR 252)³. My parents taught me the value of laughter, by example, by being able to defuse a family feud with the humorous charity minded intervention.

Those things that cause us to laugh could be indications of whether our thoughts are selfish or unselfish. It is not easy to laugh hypocritically. Laughter indicates either sincerity, or contempt, or a plain old reaction to the absurd. It is difficult to judge others and their motives for laughter. However, since laughter is spontaneous, I believe it comes from the will. Do we laugh at another's mishap, or do we feel compassion and want to help?

A sincere sense of humor supports the neighbor; it wants him to succeed, not fail. Sense of humor is necessary at times to maintain the communication bridge, especially with our spouse. A good sense of humor allows us to be flexible and find the balance between the absurd and order⁴. Can we laugh with spontaneous glee at the good things that happen to others, the engagement announcement? A baby's birth, or the job promotion?

Laughing at ourselves is a positive quality, which looks toward regeneration. Can we laugh at ourselves when in a selfish state, when not just laughing at our own jokes? Hardly. When we make a mistake, or blunder, and realize that we don't have to feel perfect and superior, we can laugh. This is a wonderful way to offset embarrassment. This is a graceful way of recognizing and admitting that we are fallible. Laughter deflates arrogance and leads us to affirmative humility, which recognizes and admits to a mistake without self-pity³. As G. K. Chesterton wrote:

I am all in favor of laughter. Laughter has something in it in common with the ancient winds of faith and inspiration; it unfreezes pride and unwinds secrecy; it makes men forget themselves in the presence of something greater than themselves; something that they cannot resist.⁵

Let this something else be the Lord, and let us pray that our life is full of sincere laughter from joys and delights, where good is the product.

Bibliography

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