

Guiding Questions

Between Heaven and Mirth by James Martin, S.J.

While... or after reading this book, consider the following general questions for discussion. Also, bring your own insights and questions to the sharing session.

Preliminary Questions:

What types of humor make you laugh out loud?

Describe the last time you laughed heartily. What was the situation?

Have you ever thought of anything religious or spiritual to be funny? Describe.

Introduction and Chapters One and Two:

Why do you think that religious institutions, as well as religious leaders and members are often more serious or at times morose?

Father Martin considers faith as something that leads to joy. How does that happen?

How would you define the terms joy, humor, and laughter?

We are drawn to joy because we are drawn to God. Describe some joyful people to whom you are personally drawn.

What are some things that people in Jesus' times would have found humorous, even though we might not? How about some Old Testament examples?

What was your favorite joke or humorous situation from these chapters?

Chapters Three and Four:

What is the difference between relating to the saints as patrons or companions? Describe some humor of the saints.

How does humor evangelize? How is it a tool for humility?

How do you imagine your relationship with God? Is it intensely serious...playful...lighthearted?

How is humor healing?

“Joy, humor, and laughter should be a part of everyone’s spiritual life.” Support this statement from what you have read (or experienced).

Chapter Five:

How does Father Martin describe vocation?

How is service connected with joy? Have you ever experienced this sense of joy?

How is “The Visitation” an expression of joy?

Chapter Six:

Father Martin relates the story about Groucho Marx and the priest who rushed over to see the great film comedian. The priest says, “Thank you, Groucho, for bringing so much joy and laughter into people’s lives!” “Thank you,” Groucho replied, “for taking so much joy and laughter out of them.”

Has this been a true experience of church and religion for you? How has church been a source of joy and laughter?

How can humor tear down rather than build up?

Chapter Seven:

Are we expected to be joyous all the time, even when life “stinks”??

How do I find joy?

What do I do if I live or worship in a joyless environment?

Chapters Eight and Nine:

How does “not being in control” lead to joy?

How is levity a sign of God’s presence in your life?

How can we be joyful with God?

Final Thoughts:

What in this book was most inspirational for you? most practical and helpful? most humorous?

How can you “lighten up” your spirituality? your religious celebrations?

What saint can you laugh with and learn from?

“Thank God for salt, leaven, and light. Thank God for salt in bland times, for leaven in flat times, for light in dark times. Humor is salt, light, and leaven. Humor is a gift to the church.”