

## God, Life, and Everything Bright Sunday

I've never been much of a standup guy. Wait, that didn't come out right.

I've never been much of a standup comedian.

In fact, nobody would accuse me of being all that hilarious. But I'm going to take a stab at it this Sunday in what is called in some traditions, "Bright Sunday," but which may become known at St. James' as "Gong Show Sunday."

Actually, the Sunday after Easter has another traditional if informal name: "Low Sunday." As in low attendance. After all, people went to church on Easter Day. You don't want to overdo it.

When I first heard about Bright Sunday, I thought it was a silly attempt to counteract Low Sunday. As it turns out, Bright Sunday (it's known as Holy Humor Sunday), has been around for hundreds of years, long before NASCAR, baseball, movies, and malls and all those other religions.

But what IS Bright Sunday (I hear you ask)?

It is a day of jokes both verbal and practical. In church. As part of church. On purpose.

We are giving Bright Sunday a try at St. James' because when I first heard about it, it seemed too ridiculous to be true. So, I went to that bastion of truth and enlightenment, Google, to look up what there was on it.

The floodgates didn't open, but there were trickles of information on it. In *The Joyful Newlester*, I found this:

For centuries in Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant countries, the week following Easter Sunday, including "Bright Sunday" (the Sunday after Easter), was observed by the faithful as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

Churchgoers and pastors played practical jokes on each other, drenched each other with water, told jokes, sang, and danced.

The custom was rooted in the musings of early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. "*Risus paschalis* - the Easter laugh," the early theologians called it.

In 1988 the Fellowship of Merry Christians began encouraging churches and prayer groups to resurrect Bright Sunday celebrations and call it "Holy Humor Sunday," with the theme: "Jesus is the LIFE of the party."

Other sources mention just plain old jokes as their focus, and to be honest, that may be enough to get going. I have a son who is tremendously clever at practical jokes (like the evening my wife and I came home to find a bloody arm sticking out from under the bed. Or the day I went downstairs at 5:00 in the morning and was met by two men sitting on our sofa - which turned out to be stuffed snowsuits with ski hats and goggles). I don't want to give him any ideas.

So what kind of jokes do you tell on Bright Sunday? I don't know. Maybe, "Why did the priest cross the road? Because he was too modest to cross himself."

They get worse.

Trust, me, I've been scouring the internet for jokes to tell - you know, jokes that a guy *can* tell in church. It's hard to find one that isn't raunchy, worn out or too complicated to understand.

And don't even get me started on golf jokes - a parishioner was trying to tell me the other day, and the second he started talking about "topping" the ball, I had to stop him. Too technical.

But if YOU have any good jokes that you think people might appreciate on a Sunday morning - jokes that won't get be ridden out of town on a rail - e-mail them to me.

Seriously.

Then I can blame you.