



**Digital Commons@**

Loyola Marymount University  
LMU Loyola Law School

---

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

---

2006

## The Joy of Criticizing

Fr. Randy Roche

*Loyola Marymount University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "The Joy of Criticizing" (2006). *Spiritual Essays*. 229.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/229>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu).

## The Joy of Criticizing?

Though we might laugh at one another's foibles, and spend time and energy noting the negative aspects of others' appearance or behavior, we do not associate criticism with spontaneous feelings of joy. When we look with respect upon those whom we had formerly been criticizing, their faults do not disappear nor do their habits change. But when we focus on the ordinary goodness of others, we are liable to experience joy.

Of course we should not overlook all negative, inappropriate behavior in others. We must carefully and honestly note and respond to the words and actions, the attitudes and even appearances of those with whom we relate. But we do not find happiness in noting their weaknesses and failings. We take pleasure in the discovery of those sparks, and sometimes flames, of goodness, creativity, and transcendence of which weak, flawed people are capable. They are like us, and we are like them, in having characteristics that appeal to some people and not to others, in having limited talents and also a limited number of faults.

Our sense of being fully human deepens and grows when we talk about, listen to, and celebrate the honest attempts that ordinary people make to embrace the realities of life. The people whom we can easily criticize are all beloved children of God; they are loved by their parents and friends, and are respected by all those who have discovered in them some of God's good gifts. If we choose the mode of criticism, we are like teachers who are constantly displeased with the forgetfulness, incompetence, and inept performance of students. Other teachers notice all those same behaviors, but they take joy in the least bit of improvement of their students. We have an option as to which point of view to take as we look upon those around us.

Many of us have at least once opened *The Joy of Cooking*. Whether or not we like to cook, the attitude resonates with us. Who would want to read "The Nuisance of Cooking?" We want to be critical thinkers in terms of distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic behavior, between truth and falsity, honesty and lies, reality and fantasy. But we do not need to become simply critical of people in most or even much of our thoughts and words. We can distinguish between critical as in a balance, and critical as an attitude that becomes expressed primarily in negative thoughts and comments. There is no joy to be found in constant criticizing.

Though it is easy to criticize others, it is not hard to acknowledge the good that they do. We might have become more practiced and skilful at criticism, and might need to become more aware of what others ordinarily do quite well, but it is not more difficult to praise than to criticize. A smile requires fewer muscles than a scowl; it takes less energy to acknowledge and recognize what is right, good, true, honest, or beneficial in the world than the opposite. When we critically evaluate the behavior of others for the sake of improvement, we have a sense of satisfaction from engaging in difficult but necessary work. If our motive for criticizing others is to build ourselves up by diminishing their reputation, we will not experience joy. Those who appear to be happy, beautiful, or successful, but who focus their energy on criticism of others become joyless persons, ugly in spirit.

God is love. We are created in the image of God, but that does not mean for us that we are without fault or flaw. Our most God-like quality is our ability to give and to receive love. When we love others as they are, we will experience joy, "the infallible sign of the presence of God."