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2011

Clap Your Hands

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Clap Your Hands" (2011). *Spiritual Essays*. 196.

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Clap Your Hands

If we go to a performance, a sports event, or a celebration – anything from a concert to a child’s kindergarten recital, a major league baseball game or a good-bye party at an office, we will likely have occasion to clap our hands. Usually, in company with others who feel as we do about a person or an event, we applaud the accomplishments of individuals or of groups. We experience some delight that we would like to express, or at least have a desire to show respect or appreciation. Sometimes we clap our hands as part of a social ritual, and at other times as a spontaneous expression of joy.

Clapping our hands is definitely audible, an external expression that some of us very carefully reserve for certain public events but not others, and that we rarely do in a private setting. Others of us are perhaps more used to demonstrative behavior, whether by culture or personality so that in a church setting, for example, we join with those who sing out loud, and we might occasionally clap our hands in a communal celebration. At rare moments of intense joy, whether we are alone or with others, we might clap our hands quite spontaneously and briefly because we have no other way to acknowledge the depth and power of our feelings.

Appreciation, gratitude, and similar interior movements are more important for us and for others than the means we take to express ourselves. Sometimes, rather than bringing our hands together to make a sound, we might metaphorically clap our hands at some of our experiences of joy. If we are alive as humans, we have to acknowledge gratitude and thankfulness at times or we will lose one of our most human qualities. Even though God certainly does not need a “round of applause” for creating not only all that is beautiful, but also our external senses for perceiving beauty and our internal senses for appreciating it, we become more fully human when we recognize these and many other gifts in our everyday lives.

Children are usually spontaneous in their expressions of joy, while some of us become more reserved in the presence of others as we take into consideration the effects upon others of our behavior. If we choose not to manifest our feelings, for whatever reasons, we surely do not want to under-appreciate people, inspirations, and events that touch our hearts. Acknowledging them, allowing ourselves to feel gratitude, or excitement, and at least noting the desire to “clap our hands” is a sign of spiritual health.

If we are not aware that we manifest experiences of joy, even to ourselves or to God, a little reflective exercise might increase the possibility of our doing so. Notice the difference between clapping and booing; between smiling and frowning; between encouraging and criticizing. Unless we have

become quite callous to the movements in our hearts, we can easily recognize that we feel better about one set of actions than the others. God made us capable of appreciating goodness at any and every level as a benefit to us and to everyone around us.

“Clap your hands, all you peoples; acclaim God with shouts of joy!” (Ps 47:1)