



**Digital Commons@**

Loyola Marymount University  
LMU Loyola Law School

---

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

---

2008

## "Be Happy!"

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, ""Be Happy!"" (2008). *Spiritual Essays*. 43.  
<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/43>

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).

“Be Happy!”

If we hear or see the words, “Be happy,” we do not take them as a command. We cannot make ourselves happy in the same way that we can make a cup of coffee. We can choose a course of action that is so in accord with our capacities and basic orientation in life that we will likely experience happiness. Or we can reflect upon some of the positive aspects of our actions and interactions, and thus renew our awareness of inner peace that we might identify as happiness.

A happy person is not someone who never suffers; those who are at peace with themselves and the world about them were not born that way. Inner contentment is most often perceived or felt after we have dealt as best we can with challenges. Happiness is a natural, spiritual consequence following appropriate choices that we make in our daily lives.

Some of the most helpful things we do, and a number of the most difficult decisions we make, are stressful and perhaps painful for us, yet we know that they are in complete accord with our values and chosen way of life. We are not always having fun, but we can often recognize, especially when we reflect upon our inner state of being, that we have a general, abiding sense of peace. If “joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God,” an abiding sense of peace is also a manifestation of the working of God’s Spirit within us.

Many people do not identify with the word “happiness,” even if they are the men and women of whom anyone who knows them would say: “They always do the right things, and for the right reasons.” People who live in accord with their calling in life may endure distress and sadness in their lives; rarely do they feel that particular kind of pain that comes from acting contrary to the truth they find in their hearts. But if they do not recognize, acknowledge, or value the integrity of their day-to-day choices and actions, they might not experience what is meant by “happiness.”

God not only wants us to “act justly,” but to experience some of the positive consequences of acting in accord with the inspirations and guidance God gives us. “Doing the right thing” is praiseworthy; reflecting on the graced choices we have made often results in a sense of quiet joy and peace of spirit. Actions, even our best efforts, might not bring us satisfaction if we immediately run on to the next item on our internal agenda. But if we take a brief moment to reflect at the conclusion of one event, or a few moments to reflect later in the day

(or in the evening) we will integrate our actions with the spirit from which they flow. The normal human spiritual response to such integration is a sense of inner appreciation, which some call "happiness."

The opposite of peace and happiness is true guilt, which is not the same as suffering. If we make choices that are contrary to the ordinary inspirations and graces we receive, we will experience dissonance and disruption in our hearts. Happiness and peace cannot abide in a divided heart. If we know what is ours to do or say and we do not act because we are afraid of possible difficulties, we will feel dis-spirited. We cannot bring about happiness by any other means than being true to ourselves as children of God.

Happiness, or its counterpart, an interior sense of peace, is akin to sunlight. We cannot hold on to sunlight, but we usually know what to do that will place us in the path of the continually moving sun. If we close ourselves off in a place where we believe that we will be safe and will not be hurt, we will not see the sun rise or set. Avoiding pain as if it were the direct opposite of happiness is like keeping the blinds perpetually closed. The people who are most fulfilled are those who are so busy loving that whatever suffering they experience is not their primary concern.

God does not command us to "be happy," but does give us the "Great Commandment" to love. Following that directive enables us to encounter happiness.