

Comedy is not anarchic; it is a defender of a more human order. William Lynch

How many of us can identify with today's first reading: life is a bore, the same darned thing day after day, sheer monotony. "Shall I ever see happiness again?"

Many years ago, as I sat among 300 other seminarians in the semicircular auditorium of the Gregorian University in Rome listening to a lecture by Fr. Tromp (yes, that was his name) on the nature of the Trinity, I caught – out of the corner of my eye - some movement in the balcony which stretched along the front of the hall and over the high dais and lectern where Father Tromp was speaking. Now you have to realize these 300 seminarians came from every nation under the sun. There were Germans in red cassocks, Frenchmen in blue sashes, Scots in the color of heather, Brazilians in green piping, Africans and Asians, all of whom were wearily trying to follow Fr. Tromp's monotonous Latin discourse.

But obviously they too saw what I saw, for now all eyes were raised to that balcony where the figure of an American seminarian had sidled along until he stood directly over the unsuspecting Fr. Tromp. This seminarian then produced a cup of soapy water and a bubble pipe and began to do you know what. Just at that moment Fr. Tromp had lifted his head and hand to make a point when down before him there fell a continuous flow of glistening, rainbow hued bubbles. He paused, looked up. We held our breath. And then the whole chamber roared with laughter. That seminarian had brought us all down to earth – having probably been inspired by the Trinity itself to do so, since Fr. Tromp was having a terrible time explaining it to us in the first place. There were other such incidents – as when in the midst of a lecture on the Church in that same vast auditorium a somewhat groveling member of some religious order, carrying an armful of books, came in late, slamming the door. As he passed right in front of the lecturer, he dropped all the books on the floor and spent all of several minutes trying to gather them up – only to drop the armful twice more with much clatter before reaching his seat high in the hall's back row. We learned later that he was no member of a religious order at all but some wag from the English College out to break up the monotony of the class.

Breaking the monotony! That's what humor does, nor do I think we fully realize the redemptive importance of such humor in our lives. Of course, I don't mean ridicule, for ridicule is not funny but the product of a mean streak characteristic of people too serious for their own good, like Bible-thumpers and ideologues. And why are they always so serious? Because they've got everything figured out and are not amused if contradicted. Monotonously "correct" in their approach to life, they have no tolerance for its often hilarious complexity.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus says he wants to move beyond Capharnaum to deliver Good News, "tidings of joy" to people far and wide; in other words to blow rainbow-hued bubbles like my seminarian friend, to disturb the monotony of Pharisaical religion, to exorcise the demons that keep us in the kind of funk expressed by Job in today's first reading. His disciples will soon prove that they have a much more serious, *political* agenda for him to pursue and already want to manage his movements. The result? They will have no little share in the efforts of humorless scribes and Pharisees to turn what was meant to be a Divine Comedy into a Tragedy. A humorless world unamused by the multidimensionality of Christ and his vision of life will kill him, expel him from this world's auditorium. - except, come Easter, we shall all know who had the last laugh!