

Earlier this week, I was talking with a friend of mine who is a Jesuit priest. At the end of our conversation, I asked him his thoughts on “The Woman at the Well” Gospel. In that Gospel story, the woman Jesus speaks to is a Samaritan and she has led a sinful life. I’ll preface the response of this particular Jesuit, by noting that Jesuits, over the years, have rightly or wrongly, gained a reputation for “interesting” or “creative” takes on Church teachings. My friend who is smart as a whip said, “I love that story because it demonstrates Christ’s humanity. Jesus is playing with her. Yes, he's making serious points to her but in a playful manner and it WORKED. She came to believe.” He proceeded to give some reasons, based on things said in their conversation, why the conversation was initially lighthearted.



At first, I wasn't buying his premise. I had never heard this commentary before. However, then I remembered two recent back-to-back conversations I had at the gym. I saw one guy I know wearing a skull and bones T shirt. I said something, to the effect, in a sarcastic manner, “Oh, we are wearing Satanic T shirts now.” He laughed. We then got into a long meaningful spiritual conversation. Right after it ended, a woman, who I know from the gym, walked by. I said, “Judy (not her real name), it’s now Lent. That means in about six weeks you need to make your first appearance in Church since Christmas.” She laughed and we got into a nice conversation too. She's resolved to make the effort to go to Church weekly.

Please keep the eye rolling to a minimum as I compare myself to Jesus, but like Jesus, I was at a place where people gather. He at a water well and I am at a gym. If my friend is right, Jesus used humor to break the ice. I did the same. Jesus had a meaningful, life changing conversation with the woman at the well. I'm not going to go that far regarding my gym conversations, but they were at least meaningful.

My point is a playful attitude, a smile and humor can be just as effective or more effective than a lecture in winning souls. So if the lecture isn't working, why not try humor? For years, whenever I saw my non church going sister, I'd say with a big smile and puzzled look, “Jen, what Mass exactly are you taking the kids to? Is it the 9am or the 10:30 Family Mass?” For years she'd laugh, but one day she said, “you know, we've been trying to make the Family Mass.” Humor and a smile seem to have worked for Jesus. Perhaps, it will work for us too. They say the quickest and cheapest way to improve your looks is to smile more. Maybe the best way to influence our family and friends, who have wandered away from the church, is to remind them in a lighthearted way that God is patiently waiting for them.