

Father Joe

by Tony Hendra

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe the author's feelings about his childhood Catholic faith? How would you describe his parent's faith?
2. What do you think attracted the author to Ben and Lily Bootle? Would you describe their marriage as a good one? How would you describe their faith lives?
3. On page 51, Hendra describes,

“Monk groupies are also Catholics, with an insatiable thirst for pious gossip and intrigue. On matters of faith and doctrine they're reticent; they'll know where so-and-so in the diocese stands on an issue or whether such-and-such an Episcopal policy is likely to get this or that luminary's blessing. They rarely have opinions of their own.

What do you think he meant by the term “Catholic?” Is there such a thing as pious gossip? Can you have an opinion of your own in the Catholic Church?

4. Do you think Ben achieved the desired result he was hoping for when he introduced Tony to Father Joe? What do you think Father Joe's response was to Ben? How did Father Joe feel about Lily?
5. What happened to make Tony lose his faith? Do you remember when you first became aware of your own mortality? (page 91)
6. On page 159, Tony writes,

“Nothing explained the giddy, scary laughter that blasphemy induced in me, sense of being cut free, floating in a seductive void, with no idea where I was going and no concern about it either, a kind of high, really. As if blasphemy was my drug of choice.

What do you think fueled Tony's need to blaspheme and why was it like a drug?

7. On page 189, Tony says,

“You seem more worried about the effect satire has on the satirist, Father Joe.” Is it ever okay to humorously mock or criticize others? What do you think is funny? What kind of humor do you find offensive?

8. On page 193, Tony realizes a lot of the work that he and his colleagues do is to receive attention. Father Joe replies,

“Needing attention is a p-p-powerful force in the world, isn’t it?” He also states that without God, people find it very hard to know who they are or why they exist. But if others pay attention to them, praise them, discuss them, or write about them, they think they’ve found the answers to both questions....The result is that you have a personality that other people shape. What do you think of Father Joe’s assertion? How much attention do you need?

9. *“When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. When the Father laughs at the Son and the Son laughs back at the Father that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and that love is the Holy Spirit.”*

What are your thoughts on this description of the Holy Trinity? (page 199)

10. What was Tony’s reaction when he discovered his true vocation (with Father Joe’s help)? What is your true vocation? Have you embraced it?
11. In the book, Tony describes Father Joe as his “spiritual father.” Tony always was concerned about what Father Joe would think about what he was doing with his life at any given time. Do you have a “spiritual father” or a “spiritual mother?” Who has influenced you the most in your spiritual life?