

YOUR
GUIDE
TO A
Happy
Life

Wisdom from

FR. JOE SICA



TWENTY-THIRD
PUBLICATIONS

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FOREWORD

On March 31, 2020, we lost a precious friend.

In a blink, he was gone...

But is he?

His desk was left perfectly clean; not a paper or pen misplaced. But sitting in front of us was the completed version of his 2021 Lenten reflections, ready to teach us once again. Ready to inspire us once again. Ready to give us hope once again.

Then silently in the background was another gift from Fr. Sica.... Another book, one none of us knew about, and just about ready to be published: *Your Guide to a Happy Life: Wisdom from Fr. Joe Sica*. This a collection of some of Fr. Sica's most treasured pieces that he left for us as a final gift.

For those of us who knew and loved him, our world is a darker place. Our job to honor him is to go forward with the faith and optimism of Fr. Joe Sica.

For those who did not know him, my hope is that this little book gives you a glimpse of who he was: a man who loved his work, loved his people, and loved his God.

His approach was often unconventional, and he was not saintly. But neither are most saints. And he lived by one basic principle: "What would Jesus do now?"

As Bishop Joseph Bambera beautifully described at Fr. Joe's graveside, "Every bishop should have a Joe Sica....Despite the occasional insanity, he baptized every baby, married every couple, and buried every person who sought a Catholic service. While so

many of us were examining the rules, Joe Sica went to work welcoming so many into the arms of the Catholic faith.” Yes, he acted as Jesus would want.

Wisdom is defined as “the natural ability to understand things that most people cannot understand.” Wisdom can be packaged in many ways. There was only one package for Fr. Sica’s wisdom. Perhaps unconventional, but it worked. This book, so appropriately titled, offers us a sample of his wisdom.

May you read these pages and smile, remembering the man he was.

So, to answer the original question... Is he really gone?

Not a chance; he’s right here, still teaching....

He often said, “Remember, yesterday was in the past. Tomorrow is not yet here. So, really what we have is NOW.” So go and live Life, now.... And enjoy the ride.

Fr. Joseph Sica, thank you for giving us this one last gift.

See you on the Other Side!

With loving respect,

Your friend,

Linda Barrassé

~~~~~ PART I ~~~~~

# Cultivate Joy

*“I have told you  
this so that my joy  
may be in you,  
and your joy may  
be complete.”*

**JOHN 15:11**

# Joyology

*Dear Lord, use me to spread joy  
and make my joy complete. Amen.*

“**W**HAT GETS YOU THROUGH IT?” I ask, acknowledging someone’s deep pain. “Splashes of joy,” they respond, refreshed and ready to keep going. This is the key to the way we should live—simply and completely.

Grounded in God as the foundation of all our joy, we align our actions, interactions, choices, and behaviors with a joyous attitude and gratitude. We can become joyologists.

**Attitude.** Things often don’t go according to plan. Sometimes they go utterly and spectacularly wrong. Joyologists aren’t free of life’s speed bumps. Life even delivers them a truckload of lemons on occasion. But joyologists simply edit out the negative, recognizing that negativity breeds negativity. Then they edit in the good that is happening, no matter how little or much.

**Gratitude.** Joyologists don’t worry obsessively, lament over the might-have-beens, or get caught up in “someday...” They are grateful for every moment, give thanks for the good in their lives, and appreciate the little things—a breathtaking sunset, an engaging conversation, a delicious meal. Fully engaged in the now, when life gets bumpy, they choose to power ahead.

God directs joyologists to connect with people who are having a hard time bouncing back, helping them turn the lemons into a refreshing glass of lemonade.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *If you’re feeling lost and unsure, list the things in life that bring you joy and happiness. Then go and enjoy them!*

# Heaps of Healing Humor

*Jesus, help me believe that laughter makes life the merriest of go-arounds. Amen.*

I WAS INSPIRED BY A WOMAN IN HER FOURTH STAGE OF OVARIAN CANCER. Even her doctors were amazed at how well she was doing. Her secret? Laughter.

“My sense of humor helps me find a lighter side of things, even on tough days,” she told me.

What do we need to survive life’s heartaches? Heaps of healing humor. Healing humor reduces stress, elevates moods, boosts the immune system, and fosters relaxation. It helps us overlook the ugly, tolerate the unpleasant, cope with surprises, and smile through the unbearable. Humor is a shock absorber, minimizing the pain troubles can bring.

Today’s people seem to be serious about everything. Some go through life with their finger on the panic button, crossing bridges before they get to them, certain trouble is just around the corner. The prescription for those suffering from humor-deficiency: an injection of laughter.

People with positive outlooks laugh often to relieve themselves of life’s tears. A good belly laugh stirs the blood, expands the chest, and clears the cobwebs from the brain.

Laughter is a gift we need to survive. If it’s missing, put it back!

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Schedule a “laughter-noon” with friends.*

*This could be an in-person visit or virtual visit through your computers or mobile phones. The most important part? Share a laugh!*

# Seize Life Daily

*Jesus, you are so very good to give me a fresh, bright, gift-wrapped day. Amen.*

I LOVE THE SIGN ON THE DESK OF A FUNERAL DIRECTOR I KNOW: *ANY DAY ABOVE THE GROUND IS A GOOD ONE!* Look at each day with fresh eyes. Nobody has messed it up yet; it's a new day to enjoy. It's a day that hasn't been lived in, and you can live it with gusto.

How do we grab the gusto? How do we bring excitement into this life? I don't mean cheap, amusement-park-stimulated excitement. What can make us eager to leap out of bed in the morning, filled with purpose?

You'll find the secret on a bumper sticker that says *Carpe Diem—Seize the Day*. The phrase implies immediacy, passion, gusto. Hesitate and it's gone forever. Jesus advises John's disciples: Seize life! Don't let it go. Be ready to live it now, before it's too late.

We can't live our lives over, but we can make progress from where we are to where God wants us to be. Seize the day! Live every God-given moment. Enjoy life. Love those in your life and treat others with respect. Be remembered for your smile, the laugh lines around your eyes, and the twinkle deep within. Make every day special.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Write Carpe Diem on index cards. Decorate them. Hand them out to family and friends.*



# You Are Someone's Spotlight

*Jesus, there's nothing more uplifting than knowing someone cared enough about me to influence me so well. Amen.*

**P**OP STAR DEMI LOVATO TOLD *COSMOPOLITAN* MAGAZINE, “When I was younger, I needed someone in the spotlight to idolize, who stood for positivity and light and happiness and wanted to change the world. And because I didn’t have that, I realized I wanted to do that, if only for my twelve-year-old little sister.”

Each of us carries the flu—not the disease kind, but the in-“flu”-ential kind. We will affect every person we come into contact with. Even if we’re unaware, people will adopt certain mannerisms, catchphrases, and attitudes from us.

You’re always communicating simply by being who you are, saying what you say, and doing what you do. You may be the only carrier of positive influence to another person.

When you’re a healthy carrier of influence, you showcase absolute integrity, possess a positive frame of mind and attitude, deliberately listen, understand, and appreciate people’s differences, and do what’s right. You emphasize optimism, empathy, encouragement, and inspiration. The results? You experience a higher quality of life as you are healthier and feel good about yourself.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Draw a circle on paper and write: “My sphere of influence.” Whom could you influence in a positive and powerful way?*

# Fortified Boundaries

*Dear Lord, sometimes I go over the limit for others and I feel drained.  
Encourage me to claim time for myself. Amen.*

“**T**OURING ISN’T SOMETHING I’M GOOD AT,” ADELE TOLD THE CROWD AT AUCKLAND’S MT. SMART STADIUM. “I don’t know if I will ever tour again.”

Boundaries are created when we understand and know what our personal limits are. When we try to do everything, we crash. Ultimately, we’re stressed, pressed, sad, impatient, tired, and even angry; we feel weak and ashamed. To avoid going over the edge, we must recognize our boundaries and make the world comfortable for ourselves—while striving to be our absolute best within our comfort zone. Knowing our boundaries means downsizing, making healthy choices, or saying, “No, I can’t do it.”

We must also set healthy boundaries in our relationships by standing up for ourselves and refusing to tolerate pushy people or rude comments. Fortified boundaries preserve our integrity as we take responsibility for who we are by letting others know we have self-respect and won’t tolerate having someone else define us. We are in the driver’s seat of our lives.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Give yourself permission to put you first. Choose a “Me Day.” Go to a coffee shop, order a latte, and read a novel uninterrupted. Or come up with something uniquely you.*

# Laughter: The Best Medicine

*Jesus, help me to laugh at myself;  
then I'll never cease to be amused. Amen.*

**T**OO OFTEN WE TAKE OURSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY. We always worry about looking good and appearing dignified. The result is that we miss out on a lot of fun.

Laughter is nutrition for the soul, a tourniquet to stop a bleeding broken heart, a tonic for the discouraged. Things will inevitably happen that cause you to feel you've lost control. Yet, if you turn them around and laugh about them, circumstances will not control you. Laughing together over life's twists and turns is a great way to let off steam and keep stress to a minimum. When you do, you are in charge, instead of circumstances being in charge of you.

I once officiated at a wedding where I wanted everything to go off without a hitch. Just as I finished the opening prayer, the air conditioner kicked on from the vent above me. The air blasted my notes all over the wedding party. Paper hung in the air for one dramatic second before raining down and gliding under the pews. I cracked a joke, which broke the tension into hysterical laughter. Instead of being embarrassed or fretting over this "hitch," it became a happy, humorous memory.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Give a mirror to someone who has forgotten how to laugh and remind them that life is like a mirror. If we frown at it, it frowns back. If we smile, it returns the greeting.*

# Happiness at Work

*Jesus, help me to create happiness in my life through patient and deliberate effort. Amen.*

**W**HY SHOULDN'T OUR LIVES BE FULL OF BRIGHTNESS, GOODNESS, PRODUCTIVITY, AND GROWTH? We must hope that every decision we make, every action we perform, will take us in the right direction—the direction necessary for happiness. Even our mistakes can be cause for optimism by offering us opportunities for learning and greater awareness.

Happiness is difficult to define. It's a personal thing. For some, it is rare and only brought on by extraordinary circumstances. I, on the other hand, am most happy with ordinary things: dinner with friends, ministering at a hospital bed, a walk in the neighborhood, good conversation, a hug. Since each of us is unique, what makes one person happy may have the opposite effect upon another.

If we want happiness to be more than an irregular and passing feeling, then we must make a sound and strong commitment to make our own happiness. Abraham Lincoln said, "People are about as happy as they choose to be." Knowing that we're in the position to conjure up and shape our own happiness is precious knowledge. From there we can learn to bring into our lives the things that make us happy and keep them there, rather than wait for irregular visits.

**HAPPINESS HABIT** » *Collect as many memories of happiness as you can. Keep them in a journal or in a file on your computer. Encourage your children to start their own journals. They will serve as a reservoir of strength when the clouds roll in, when you're wallowing in misery, or whenever you need it the most.*