

Discussion Questions

Joan Chittister:
Her Journey from
Certainty to Faith

By Tom Roberts



Copyright
joanchittister.org

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Part I	2
Chapter 1: The God of Light	2
Chapter 2: The Early Years	2
Chapter 3: The Monastery	3
Chapter 4: Teaching and College.....	3
Part II.....	4
Chapter 5: On the Path Toward Change.....	4
Chapter 6: The Struggle to Renew.....	4
Chapters 7: Prioress	4
Part III.....	5
Chapter 8: Women	5
Chapter 9: Beyond the Community.....	5
Chapter 10: Into Uncharted Waters.....	6

Introduction

QUESTIONS:

1. Cite three pieces of information you had about Sister Joan before reading this Introduction. What were your sources for that information?
2. What “new” information in this Introduction surprised you the most? Explain why?

Part I

Chapter 1: The God of Light

QUESTIONS:

1. Roberts writes on page 4, over the years Sister Joan had concluded, “it is precisely our idea of God that is the measure of our own spiritual maturity.” Do you agree with Sister Joan? Why or why not? What is your idea of God? What do you believe it reveals about your spiritual maturity?
2. At the bottom of page 5 Sister Joan shares four “lessons” she learned regarding all she had been taught about God. Have you learned any of these “lessons”? What brought you to one or more of these realizations?
3. What in this chapter challenged your thinking about God the most?

Chapter 2: The Early Years

QUESTIONS:

1. “Her childhood days were constantly menaced by the possibility of violence, a fact she kept hidden for years because, she explained, she didn’t want her teachers and religious superiors or her peers in

community to know that ‘I didn’t come from a perfect Catholic family’” (13). What does this say to you about Sister Joan?

2. <https://www.safeneterie.org>. This is a source for anyone in Erie, PA who is a victim of domestic or intimate partner violence. Review this site, or any other like it. What are two or three things you learned? Share it with anyone you think may want this information.

3. What is the most significant thing you realized about Sister Joan in this chapter?

Chapter 3: The Monastery

QUESTIONS:

1. “Loretta had a different view.” (35) Did this surprise you? Do you think Loretta’s response to Mother Sylvester was unusual, given her circumstances?

2. What lesson could someone learn from the way Sister Joan dealt with having polio?

3. What is the most significant thing you realized about Sister Joan in this chapter?

Chapter 4: Teaching and College

QUESTIONS:

1. There are several very honest statements that Roberts quotes Sister Joan as saying in this chapter. Choose one or two that surprised you the most and share why.

2. What awarenesses did you gain about monastic life in this chapter?

3. What is the most significant thing you realized about Sister Joan in this chapter?

Part II

Chapter 5: On the Path Toward Change

QUESTIONS:

1. What changes in religious life revealed in this chapter did you least expect? Discuss.
2. Sister Joan faced numerous challenges in this chapter. Which one or two do you think were the most difficult for her? Discuss why.
3. What is the most significant thing you realized about Sister Joan in this chapter?

Chapter 6: The Struggle to Renew

QUESTIONS:

1. "It is true that the group in large part agreed that the religious life of the past was peaceful, stable, and secure. It is also true that they considered it closed, introverted, restrictive, and static. They said it was impersonal." (95) Did these opposing realities surprise you? Discuss why or why not.
2. What is your response to the attitude and actions of Bishop John Whealon?
3. What is the most impressive thing you learned about Sister Margaret Mary Kraus in this chapter?

Chapters 7: Prioress

QUESTIONS:

1. Roberts writes on page 141: "For all her fame and, some might say, notoriety, for all of the causes with which she has been associated, all the accolades she has received, it is safe to say that Chittister would

name the corporate commitment near the top of any list of her achievements. Through all of the changes, the exploration and the development of new ministries, that commitment has remained constant.” Review the community’s corporate commitment today here:

<https://www.eriebenedictines.org/our-community>. What is your response to it, as well as to any other information about the community listed on this website?

2. What is the most important thing you learned about the Erie Benedictines in this chapter?

Part III

Chapter 8: Women

QUESTIONS:

1. Cite three pieces of information from this chapter that you never knew. How has this new information affected your worldview?
2. What in this chapter angered you the most? Discuss why.
3. What is the most important thing you learned about the male, clerical, Catholic Church in this chapter?

Chapter 9: Beyond the Community

QUESTIONS:

1. What did you find most compelling about Sister Joan’s remarks about God and Jesus? State one about both and why each had such a deep impact upon you.
2. Given all she became involved in “beyond the community,” what has Sister Joan taught you about commitment in this chapter?

Chapter 10: Into Uncharted Waters

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan writes on page 225: “Risk walks with God as its only sure companion. The religious congregation that risks its reputation for the sake of new questions and its benefactors for the sake of peace and its clerical support for the sake of women and its lifestyle for the sake of the ecological stewardship of the planet and its retirement monies for the sake of the poor walks the way of holy risk.” Based on this quote, identify several “holy risks” you see the Erie Benedictines currently taking.
2. Roberts writes on page 233 that “Evidence of nearly eighty years would suggest that Joan Chittister will continue always to see a beckoning God everywhere.” Do you see “a beckoning God everywhere?” Explain.
3. Write a letter to Sister Joan and tell her in what way(s) her story has been a force for growth in your life.