

# My Walk With God

## *Catholic School Years*



### Ch II

The Fall of 1944 was a time of change in my walk with Jesus. I got to touch Him as I received Holy Communion on my tongue, at the altar rail on, those Sundays when I was able to prepare for this great honor. My mother would see to it that we boys went to Confession on Saturday before we could receive Communion the following Sunday. At that time, I never went forward to receive Jesus without first going to Confession. We had all sinned in some way and needed to present ourselves spotless to Jesus before receiving Him in Holy Communion. As a family, my parents and 2 brothers all got up early on Sunday morning to go to 9 O'clock Mass. On those Sundays when we went to Holy Communion, there was no breakfast, because we couldn't have anything in our stomachs before receiving Holy Communion. I wouldn't want to receive Jesus on top of digesting food. That would be gross for Him. Our physical insides should be clean for Him just as our souls should be clean. It was the end of summer time and when we arrived at church we sat with our parents because there was no instruction for children in the summer. It was quite warm and the church was always filled with people, so much so, that if we were a little late, it was difficult to sit together and my father would stand in the back of the church. The Mass would begin. Everything was alright in my world because Jesus would soon be present again. I know that He was always present in spirit, for He is everywhere all the time and He sees us all the time. Within the Mass, however His presence was special, because He would come physically to touch us and live within us in Holy Communion.



It came time for school to start again after the summer vacation. It would be at a new school for me. During First Communion preparation we were taught by the Sisters from our parish and I would be going to their school; St. Mary's School in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. It was exciting because I would now be able to learn more wonderful things about God and how we could get to know Him

better. My excitement was soon dashed. Sister Mary Albert was my 3<sup>rd</sup> and then my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. She knew a lot about God but she didn't have very much patience or understanding of children, or so I thought. There was a crucifix in the front of the class room and an American Flag at the door. Each morning we would begin with a prayer: "In The Name Of The Father. . .". I would look at the crucifix and think, "what a horrible thing happened to Jesus. If I were there I would not have done that. Following the sign of the cross, we all recited the "Our Father, who art in heaven . . .". I knew that God was listening because He was everywhere, all the time; That was one thing that made Him different from us here on earth. Now class began.

Every day, along with our regular time for reading, writing and arithmetic, there was time set aside for learning about God. First we repeated the lessons that we learned during First Communion preparation. We knew the Ten Commandments,, but sister, our teacher told us more about them. I found out that keeping holy the Sabbath day meant more than just going to church on Sunday, I had to visit with God in my heart and mind during that day. I couldn't do that if I was occupied in doing other things that did not please God. What came first, God or digging holes in the sand lot next door? We Children didn't go around killing people so how was it that we could disobey the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment? Sister told us that when we talked badly about other people or said things like, "I hate you!" , it was the same thing as killing the spirit of the person in question. We went on through all the other commandments and I found that keeping the 10 Commandments wasn't so easy as it first seemed. After all, Sister said that everyone sinned, It was impossible not to have sinned, and that is why Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Confession. That made it possible for us to remain friends with God for the rest of our lives when we used the sacrament properly and regularly. 16.



The Sisters of Mercy were , as I understood it, hospital workers and nurses. There were some groups that became teachers but could be reassigned as nurses at Catholic Hospitals when needed. In our school,, all of the teachers were Sisters of Mercy. Our principal was Sister Mary Rosita. Sister Rosita was a very small woman in stature, old and wrinkled, and all of the children were always in fear of being sent to the principals office. As I remember, no one was ever unfortunate enough to be sent there. As I grew older I found that Sister Rosita wasn't so old, wrinkled or scary. The sisters wore a black habit that touched the floor and when they walked, it was as if they wore floating across the floor. Around their waist, they wore a broad black belt and hung from it was a very large Rosary with a crucifix at one end, that jingled when they walked. Our teacher (sister) told us that it was like the Rosary given to St. Dominic by Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and that she would teach us how to pray The Rosary. We learned the prayers for the rosary and said one decade each day. There were mysteries associated with each decade that we learned were stories about the life of Jesus and Mary, as well as His Crucifixion and Resurrection. My parents had given me my own Rosary beads that I took to school where I learned what the beads represented. When Sister taught us about the Holy Family during class, all of us students took out our rosary beads and , together, we prayed one decade and learned the story of Jesus Life.

Each day at noon time, we could hear the church bells ring and that was the time to pray The Angeles. The Angeles is a prayer in recognition of Mary, where we remember that Mary was visited by the angel who announced that she would become the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God, and Our Savior. We then asked Our Holy Mother Mary to ask Jesus to make us worthy of all the promises Jesus made for us and to bring us to Heaven with Him when we died.

Through my years at St. Mary's School in Pawtucket, the sisters taught us as much about the love of God through Jesus as about the Ten Commandments and rules of the Church. In the Spring, it was the time of Lent. I continued to remember all of the things I do that are disappointing to God and disobedient to my parents. If I was really interested in easing His pain during the Way of The Cross, I would be more considerate and careful with my behavior and how I treated other children.

Oh, now I hear the Angeles bells again, We begin: *“The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Spirit. . . .”* As we remembered in prayer each day this visit by the angel of God, we also remember that God so loved the world that He became one of us, so that we all would be saved from the damnation of evil; and live in Heaven with Him.

The Angeles always preceded lunch, and we, as children, were anxiously awaiting that most enjoyable part of our day, eating, and playing in the school yard. We didn't have a basket ball hoop but you could still play dodge ball with the basket ball. The school yard was half paved with asphalt while the back side was composed with dirt and weeds. The girls possessed the left side and the boys the right side of the yard, separated by an invisible line that could not be crossed without the admonishment of the sister who was assigned as the schoolyard supervisor for that day. The schoolyard was always an occasion for fun and for confrontation with other children. Even though I tried to remember that my actions should reflect the lessons that Jesus taught for us in His bible stories, pride would take over and the need for me to express my righteousness would result in fighting. Of course, I never considered myself at fault in any of these confrontations and I was constantly praying for the other children to conform to my needs and desires. Of course, this resulted in a timid and introverted personality, on my part. My comfort became the church, because there I didn't have any need to cooperate with any of the other children. My socialization was with God, or so I thought.

Many opportunities were available throughout the year to learn about, remember, and honor Our Lord Jesus Christ, and His life here in the world where He become one with man to save our lives for eternity in Heaven. During the Lenten season, we remembered how jealousy and arrogance on the part of the Jewish leaders resulted in the arrest of Jesus and His ultimate Crucifixion. Each Friday afternoon, at three o'clock, we school children paraded to the church for the Stations of The Cross. The priest, lead by an altar boy with the great golden crucifix, processed to the first station. They were followed by two more altar boys with candles blazing and another carrying the golden burner filled with incense. The altar boy gave the incense burner to the priest and smoke rose from their midst as we all genuflected and said, *“We adore thee O Christ and we bless thee, because by thy Holy Cross, Thou hast redeemed the world”*; Jesus was condemned to death! The procession would continue until they arrived at the the 14<sup>th</sup>



station when Jesus was finally placed in the tomb. We remembered His passion, death and burial.



On Palm Sunday, all the statues were covered with purple cloaks as we all remembered the penance we were offering for our sins. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, all of the people were shouting praises for Him, but Jesus knew that they would turn on Him in just a few hours and demand His execution on the cross. We were all given palm fronds as we entered the church, remembering of the celebration of the people in Jerusalem as Jesus entered the city on a donkey. I vowed never to turn against Jesus as the people did on that fateful day. After Mass on Palm Sunday, we all took our palm fronds home and placed them on our holy pictures or the crucifix in the

bedroom so that we could remember Jesus passion that He suffered for our salvation. These were blessed sacramentals that were to be displayed respectfully and not used as toys, the way we saw other children use them. My father took last years palms out to our backyard fire pit and burned them so they would not be mixed disrespectfully with the trash.

It was now Holy Week and Lent was coming to an end. On Holy Thursday evening, we would go to church as a family to observe the Last Supper celebration of our Lord at Mass. The Church was ablaze in light with all of the statues and other images of saints and symbols of Christ covered with purple coverings in remembrance of the Passion of Jesus about to take place. To me, The Last Supper Mass was the holiest time of Jesus life other than His birth at Christmas. He first came to us at His birth as a baby and now He chose to remain with us in His body, and blood in the Eucharist when He proclaimed, "This is My Body, and This is My Blood". I knew it was true, for I could see the face of Jesus in the Consecrated Host as the priest raised it at the altar. When the Mass was over, after we had received Jesus in Holy Communion, the precious Body of Christ that remained was wrapped in a linen cloth to simulate the burial cloth of Jesus, and processed under a 'tent' around the church for everyone to adore, as He passed by. As the priest left the altar to go into procession, there was no music, only the sharp sound of a wooden clapper showing that Jesus was proceeding to His passion,, death and burial. The altar was stripped of the altar cloth and all other things while the lights in the church were dimmed.

The procession approached the Altar of Repose.



Finally the priest with the reserved Body of Christ, followed by all the other priests of the parish, and altar boys swinging incense burners, arrived at the shrine set up at Mary's altar. As they approached, the multitude of candles at the shrine were lit, symbolizing to me, the many saints in heaven praying before the throne of God. The shrine, symbolizing the burial place of Jesus after his crucifixion, was filled with flowers that were all white

because Jesus was ultimately pure in body and spirit. The Body of Jesus in the Eucharist, was placed in the tabernacle of St. Mary's Altar, in the center of the shrine, as it represented the tomb of Jesus when He was taken down from the cross after His crucifixion.

We all prayed the Divine Praises, "*Blessed be God, Blessed be His Holy Name, etc.*" and spent the next hour in silent meditation, reflecting on our own difficulties in our own lives in relation to the example of Jesus.

Easter Sunday was nearing. Lent was coming to a close. Jesus had come to us when he gave us His body and blood in the Eucharist at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. It was still difficult to understand why the people turned on Him. He had done everything to show them the love of God, everything that is except to ultimately die for them.. That was about to happen. If it was disappointing to me, just think of what God felt at that time. The people were about to reject His Son, whom He sent to be their salvation, so that they might want to receive His love forever. Well it didn't seem to keep Jesus from carrying out His Fathers plan. He proceeded to be crucified by the people, died, and was buried, only to rise from his tomb on the third day. We were about to celebrate this on Easter Sunday.

Before we went to Mass as a family, my mother had prepared Easter baskets for us boys. They contained chocolate in the shape of bunnies and eggs. I could never understand that but it didn't matter because who didn't love chocolate? Wasn't this the celebration of Jesus rising from death? Well, maybe Jesus gave us chocolate to help us celebrate! We couldn't touch it yet though, because our stomachs must be empty to receive Jesus in Holy Communion at Mass . Who would ever want to put Jesus on top of half digested food?

When we entered the church, you could smell the fragrance of newly cut flowers. There were white lilies, white gladiolas and dahlias, filling the entire area around the altar. It was easy to imagine that Jesus had risen from the dead. In the church yard, it was springtime but the winter still was evident. Crocus however were bursting through the brown grass letting us know that nature itself was beginning to burst forth with new life, just like Jesus in His Resurrection. God was good indeed. Everywhere I looked, there was a newness about, in celebration of new life. Even the people were dressed in their best for this great feast.

Now, at Mass we remembered that Jesus gave Himself, body, blood, soul, and divinity at the Last supper. Now we would all see that this is truly continued when we receive Him in Holy Communion. Thank you Jesus for remaining with us in this way. You resurrected from the dead and reminded your friends of all that you had taught them and then left. Why? Seeing you live forever and everywhere, why do you need to leave us? I would wish that you could stay and teach us all personally as you did for the apostles. Little did I know at this point in life that You have and will always be with me in prayer and in everything that I do. You also remain with us in Holy Communion whenever we wish to receive You at Mass . I must still have a lot to look forward to.

## *NOTES*

*from the future*

*What is the world coming to?  
Remember the school yard bully. He  
would seek out a victim, attack and  
slithered away. The victim ended up  
in the Principals Office. When we  
look at the political and social world  
today it is like looking back at that  
schoolyard. What has changed?*



St. Mary's of The Immaculate Conception

Pawtucket, Rhode Island