

MY WALK WITH GOD

Thee Adolescent Years



Ch III

In the years that to place Himself in my opportunity. Mostly it I had made myself a being socially oriented,

followed, God saw fit life at every was always welcomed. very lonely child. Not keeping separate had become a way of life for me. The church was always present and I found comfort there when the world became overwhelming. Our house was about one half mile from St. Mary's Church and School. The distance made it easy to walk there each day for school. It was , however just far enough away to make it prohibitive to drop in whenever anxiety might demand solace for me. Prayer, therefore became my friend. The sisters and my grandmother had taught me that Jesus would listen to me whenever I would speak to him, in prayer, about my troubles. Church visits were made regularly at school, with our whole class and sometimes with other classes, as we marched up Delaney St. to the church on Pine St. These visits always reinforced my relationship with Jesus.

The church cemetery was right across Delaney St. from the school yard where we children played each day. The street was more like an alley because it just connected Pine St. where the church was and George St. that the school was on. I always liked to watch the activity in the cemetery. It was fascinating for me, for it was filled with grate beautiful monuments. There were angels, saints, crosses and ordinary stone grave markers that listed the names of those buried beneath them. I figured that those people would all be in heaven with God. Some days I would see men digging new graves and wondered who had now gone to live in heaven. It was usually at that time, I would remember my great aunt Annie or my mother's mother

who had gone to heaven before I was born. - I digress.

These schools' church visits were exciting to me because each time was another opportunity to come closer to Jesus who was present in a unique way in the tabernacle of the church. It wasn't like He was living in a small prison, it was more as though His spirit was living throughout the church and we could see Him in His body, present in the Holy Eucharist, reserved in the tabernacle.

As we entered the church we dipped our fingers in the Holy Water and blessed ourselves, *"In the name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit"*. To be quiet was the rule, for it allowed each of us to be present with Jesus in our own thoughts without disrupting each other. For boys, it was a challenging discipline, for girls, it was impossible. In time and with the patience of the sisters, our teachers, we came to achieve some sense of it. Order was generally achieved by the separation of the boys from the girls. We each had our own lines and assigned seats supervised by our teachers. I wondered if that is what it would be like in heaven. In my mind, anything would be acceptable in order to achieve a peaceful time. Had I forgotten that it is God who brings peace. We just seem to bring chaos.



The church provided many opportunities to experience this peace. The devotions and pageantry allowed all of us children, who seem to be always living in chaos, to come together and experience a bit of that tranquility in our lives. I always looked forward to the preparations for the Holy Thursday procession to the Altar of Repose. The whole school took part. Then there was the crowning of Mary in May, Benediction of the Holy Eucharist, 40 Hours Devotion, and as I previously commented, The Stations of The Cross on Fridays during Lent.

Benediction was held multiple times during the year, usually once a month. It was always awe inspiring. The priest would enter with his Benediction vestments,, followed by one altar boy with the censer and another altar boy with a container of incense that would be distributed over the hot charcoal in the in-censer. The Monstrance was on the altar ready to receive the Sacred Host. As Father would start to incense the Sacred Host in the Monstrance, we began to sing:

O salutaris Hostia Quae caeli pandis ostium;
Bella premunt hostilia, Da robur, fer auxillium.
Uni trinoque Domino Sit sempiterna gloria,
Qui vitam sine termino Nobis donet in patria.
Amen.

And then when he finished incensing the Host we sang:

Tantum ergo Sacramentum Veneremur cernui,
Et antiquum documentum Novo cedat ritui;
Praestet fides supplementum Sensuum defectui.

Genitori Gentoque Laus et jubilatio,
Salus, honor, virtus quoque Sit et benedictio;
Procedenti ab utroque Compar sit laudatio. Amen.

We didn't know what the Latin words meant but it seemed that the Spirit Of God was in them. It was only later that we learned the meaning of the words.

O Salutaris = O saving victim, open wide, the gate of heaven to us below.

Tantum ergo = Down in adoration falling, This great Sacrament we hail.

Finally we all recited the Divine Praises, The priest first and then echoed by the rest of us.

Blessed be God; - *Blessed be God.*

Blessed be His Holy Name; - *Blessed be His Holy Name.*

Etc. until - -

Blessed be God, in His angels and in His saints. Amen.

Now the great organ would sound again, the priest would rise to return the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle. We would all begin singing:

“Holy God we praise Thy Name”

It was always my favorite hymn and I was always sure that Jesus loved it too. Music was a big part of our schooling in those early days. One of the

sisters at the school taught music and she had a portable pump organ that she would roll into our classroom whenever it was necessary for us to learn a new hymn. One of the earliest remembrances that I have is learning "*O Lord I Am Not Worthy*" *that Thou shouldst come to me, but speak thy words of comfort, my spirit healed shall be.* Whenever we sang this I remembered how reliant on Jesus we should always be for our lives and well-being. And then there was: "*Come Holy Ghost,*" *creator blest, and in our hearts, take up thy rest.*" I would remember to seek help from The Holy Spirit to come and live within us and guide us in our everyday needs. In May we learned "*Hail Holy Queen*", and "*Immaculate Mary*", in honor of Jesus' Mother Mary as Queen of Heaven and her Immaculate Conception.

One of the best times at St. Mary's School happened on one Friday each month. There was a large basement in the school, that was set up like a hall, where school plays and sometimes movies were shown. It was there that we were able to see such films as, *The Song of Bernadette*, *don Bosco*, and Fr. Payton's productions of The Nativity, The Passion, and other bible stories. On special days there would be Hollywood productions such as *Going My Way*, *White Christmas*, and *The Bells of St. Mary's*. These film productions reinforced those bible stories we had been taught in school, but more importantly, they showed how these events affected the lives of other people in the world for the betterment of mankind. Jesus was not just a nice story told at St. Mary's for the benefit of us children alone. Jesus was real and for all people of every age.

As I progressed through my grade school years, I continued to find comfort in our daily prayers at school. Confessions were every other Saturday and Holy Communion on the following Sunday. In those days I knew that it was necessary to have a pure sinless soul in which to receive the Body of Christ. Seventh grade had finally arrived and now the time was approaching when I would receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Each year following my First Communion in the 2nd grade, we reviewed the Baltimore Catechism from the creation story. Who made me? Who is God? Why did God make you? Etc. The 10 Commandments were expanded a little each year and we came to realize that to steal meant not only taking someone's candy bar but, by lying about someone could and most-likely did, steal their good name. That could be even worse. We learned about the evil and ramifications of lust, envy, anger, pride, arrogance and the other deadly sins. We learned the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their fruits. One of the most notable lessons was a review of the

attitudes that Christians need to exemplify in order to live the way that Jesus example would lead us. These were the Be attitudes! Jesus taught us very clearly in His Sermon on The Mount that we should all be like little children if we wanted to gain Heaven and live with Him. It always seemed quite easy for us for we were already children. Little did we know of the temptations that life would bring.

What attitudes did we need to display? The attitudes went like this:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice sake, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

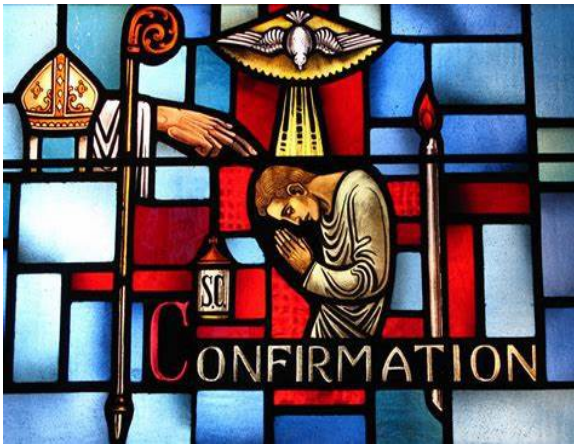
Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

As a child I didn't understand the significance of The Beatitudes but I took them at face value. It was only later in life that I found that living up to these principles would be a next to impossible task for me. In the movies that were shown at school I could see characters that seemed to live these *Beatitudes*. I thought, at the time, that it was relatively easy to live this life and proceeded to try and live like those characters I saw in the movies. I aspired to be like Don Bosco or the children at Fatima. Needless to say, I didn't do a very good job of it.

As the time for my confirmation approached, I began to recognize that language played a large part in my knowledge and understanding of God. I didn't know what language God spoke, but whatever it was, nature understood it well. At the moment of creation God said, "Let there be light." I could only imagine how powerful those words were. God spoke with authority. It wasn't English or even Latin,, because those languages came to be, many thousands of years later. I came to understand that words themselves have power. It, therefore, was necessary for me to understand the meaning and power of words. God is the word at creation and, our words can be used to show kindness, love,, disrespect or even hate. Our names themselves are words with meanings that effect us all. Usually they are selected by our parents to honor some family member whose personal

character they would like to see in their children.

In preparation for our Confirmation, sister asked us to think of a particular saint that we would like to mold ourselves after. This assignment was very difficult because I didn't know much about the saints other than St. Joseph, the Apostles, and Our Lady the Virgin Mary. I therefore picked the name of someone that I knew, who appeared to me, was a very good person that I would want to be like. Come to find out, he was also named after a saint, Gerald. Most of the other boys picked St. Joseph and the girls picked St. Mary in honor of the Blessed Mother. I was always slow in comprehending instructions given by sister in class. Some-how it was not necessary for each student to select a different saint. It would have been so easy for me to pick St. Joseph like all the other boys, but I needed to select an individual personal saint. St. Gerald was acceptable to sister so we proceeded with our Confirmation preparations. In our review of the catechism, it was necessary to pass the test. Again, we were saddled with rules, when we displayed adequate knowledge of the rules, things were good. It never occurred to us that it would be necessary to spend our lives integrating those rules into our personal lives. Knowledge was necessary because that could be measured. Application, I don't think was ever considered. Perhaps I wasn't paying attention.



In preparation, we, the confirmation candidates, all went to confession in order to ensure our souls were spotless as we invited the Holy Spirit to come and take up residence. Sister told us that we had first received The Holy Spirit at Baptism, and then again each time that we went to Holy Communion because when we receive Jesus, He cannot be separated from His Holy Spirit. Where Jesus is present, God is present in the Trinity. In Confirmation, however, The Holy Spirit imparts His Gifts upon us. These include the Gifts of: “Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety, & Fear of The Lord. These were big words for a 12 year old and I hoped that someday I would understand them.

The day of Confirmation arrived. As in all the other Sundays of the year, upon entering the church, I felt surrounded by all the saints and angels of God in Heaven. They were all depicted on the walls, windows and the

ceiling of the church, as reminders that they would be celebrating with us. All of the candidates entered the church as a group, the boys on the right St. Joseph's side, and the girls on the left, St Mary's side. The boys were all robed in blue and the girls in white. The blue robes were in honor of Holy Mother Mary, who conceived Jesus by The Holy Spirit; and the white robes of the girls represented the purity of Mary and of those candidates presenting themselves for Confirmation. As we all genuflected before the tabernacle, it was as if we were genuflecting before the throne of God. It was the Bishop of Providence who would preside. It was only the bishop who could preside at confirmation. In those days, the bishop rarely delegated that function to anyone else. To see a bishop was exciting to all of us. On the one hand we were all in awe of being confirmed by the bishop, on the other hand we were all terrified that he might question us about our knowledge of the catechism. We were all pleasantly pleased when our knowledge was only tested as a group.

The Mass began. . . In the name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit.

Introibo ad altare Dei.

S.Ad Deum qui lætificat juventutem meam.

I will go to the Altar of God, to God Who givith joy to my youth. . . .
(and the Mass Continued)

I had my St. Joseph's Missal in which I could follow the Mass as it progressed. In the missal, the Mass was presented in Latin on the left hand side and in English on the right. In addition there were pictures of the major events at the beginning of each part of the Mass so it was easier to follow when I lost my place due to day dreaming. I didn't understand the Latin, but that didn't seem to matter because the English translation was directly across the page. God, being omnipotent was aware of and understood everything, including languages so, even though the priest proclaim the Mass in Latin, my English prayers were equally acceptable and understood by God.

After the Epistle and Gospel were read in Latin at the right and left side of the altar by the priest, he would leave the altar and go to the pulpit to proclaim both the Epistle and the Gospel in English for the entire congregation to hear. The Bishop then, took his place in the pulpit to present his thoughts on those readings and his comments on the Sacrament of Confirmation. The time was approaching for the `big event. First came the time for questioning the candidates and all went well as I have

described. I was thankful to God that He provided students who were always ready to excel by showing their knowledge and willingness to speak in public. I was never so ready.

Then the candidates, boys and girls, lined up for their moment before God and the Bishop. As we individually approached, the bishop addressed us each by the name we had selected for Confirmation. We were awaiting the slap, someone had told us about, that would come from the bishop as he conferred the Holy Spirit upon us. It never happened. Instead, the bishop laid hands on us and prayed in Latin the invocation for Confirmation. I, of course, did not understand the Latin but that didn't matter because it was The Holy Spirit who came at that moment to confer His gifts upon us. I knew that each time I received Holy Communion, that Jesus came to live within me in person. Even so, this was a bit different, through the hands of the bishop I felt , God had touched me again.

NOTES

from the future

In the year 2000, I had the chance to visit St. Mary's Church on a family visit to New England. It was wonderful to see the old church still in good repair and serving the City of Pawtucket. All of the beautiful angelic visions of the Annunciation and The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven that were in the area around the altar had been painted over. It seemed a very sad expression of what I had always seen as a view of Heaven. How can a new generation experience the beauty of Heaven when we paint it over?