

MYSTICS
AND
MASHED
POTATOES

BY

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for

The St. Patrick's Seminary Class of 1991

and

in memory of Father Mark Catalana, Class of 1991

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”
Matthew 5, 8

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Terry, Christopher, and to all the “Mystics” in my life who have been my mentors, inspiring me to look to heaven and to all the “Potatoes” who have helped me to keep my feet on the ground and to fulfill my mission

Over the years I’ve enjoyed the many friends the Lord has brought across my path to share the journey Home. We have prayed together, laughed together, shared times of sorrow, chatted over coffee, and plotted ways we could assist the Lord in running the universe. Regarding the latter, the Lord usually says, “Thank you for sharing. Just finish your cappuccino; it’s getting cold.”

With one particular friend, an artistic soul, I met once for coffee at a golf course, while her high school son (pre-driver’s license) took golf lessons. The view of the golf course was lovely, but the coffee was dreadful! Noticing the menu and the high price for this atrocious coffee, my friend remarked, “Just think, Janis, for 15 cents more, we could have mashed potatoes!” Since this particular friend is a mystic, as well as a very practical person, I vowed one day to jot down a few essays under the title Mystics and Mashed Potatoes.

Since that time, her son has a driver’s license, played soccer, graduated from high school and college, is married, and has children. We still talk and pray together -- at places with much better coffee!

A.M.D.G.

21 November 2015

The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

MACARONI IN THE MONASTERY

Many years ago, long before I studied in the seminary, I discovered a beautiful monastery in a nearby town. It is located on a busy street with lots of noise and traffic.

Once inside the large, beautiful chapel, the outside noise does not matter that much. There are candles burning, sunlight pouring through the stained-glass windows, and a deep sense of peace. The chapel is kept open all day. Outside there are lovely gardens.

Sometimes, at the back of the chapel, people leave little holy cards or other “freebies.” Once, I glanced across the aisle and saw a small card, about the size of a recipe card. Sure enough, it was a recipe card, a card from a nearby grocery store with a recipe for Pasta and Shrimp Primavera.

Why not? Jesus ministered to the whole person -- body, soul, and spirit. The kind person who left a pasta recipe in the monastery was simply continuing this practical ministry.

Part 1 CHERITH

The reflections in the “Cherith” section come from 1986-1991, my years at St. Patrick’s Seminary. I was an Episcopalian at the time and was very grateful for the seminary’s ecumenical generosity in allowing me to come and study.

Since the seminary is only two or so miles from our home, I could care for my family and also study for my Master’s in Theology degree without a long commute time. I was very blessed and remain very grateful.

My years at St. Patrick’s Seminary were my “Cherith” years. Cherith was the name of the brook, east of the Jordan River, where the prophet Elijah was sheltered for a time and fed by the “ravens.” (1Kings 17)

Good Morning, Sister

One of my first mornings at St. Patrick’s, I was walking down the C wing. One of the men who worked in Buildings and Grounds smiled and said, very respectfully, “Good morning, Sister.”

I did a double-take, trying to decide how to respond. He must have thought I was a nun.

What would a nun say? I did not grow up Catholic and knew nothing about nuns.

My junior year college roommate, Johanna, was Catholic. She knew about nuns, but I knew nothing.

Did I say, “I am married and have a son?”

I just smiled and said, “Hi!”

Purified Priests and Papist Parakeets

I believe it was spring of 1987 when I took the course, “Prophets” from Fr. Michael Guinan, a very distinguished Scripture scholar. Fr. Guinan, a Franciscan priest and professor at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, commuted over to St. Patrick’s to teach this course.

I asked Fr. Guinan to suggest a topic for my term paper. He suggested writing a paper tracing and analyzing the various times in the Hebrew scriptures where the prophets criticize the priests for not living up to their sacred calling.

Writing this paper was very therapeutic for me personally as well as academically fascinating. The title was “Purify the Priests,” based on the third chapter of Malachi.

At that time, Christopher kept parakeets as pets, usually two at a time in a large cage in our sunny dining room. Sometimes the birds were allowed out of their cage.

With the large glass windows in our home, occasionally there would be a tragedy, resulting yet another little cross in the Arboretum on the Stanford campus. Another little bird committed to God’s eternal care.

Knowing that Fr. Guinan was a Franciscan priest, I thought it would be wise to have the current two little birds blessed. I took the cage up to the seminary for my class lecture. Remember, St. Francis also preached to the birds!

After class, we had a little processional to the holy water font outside the seminary chapel. Fr. Guinan duly blessed the birdies and I took them home. Christopher was very impressed with this and said, “Wow, now I have papist parakeets!”

Nun Cards

Many times during my years of study in the seminary, I had the

joy of attending ordinations to the diaconate and to the priesthood. At an ordination in Sacramento, at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, I remember sitting near an elderly lady who was quietly translating the ordination rite into Latin. She became very animated, returned to English, and asked, "Did he get de oil yet?"

At the ordination of the Class of 1991, at St. Joseph's Cathedral in San Jose, I proudly carried along cards for the newly ordained priests. There were tables at the reception for cards and gifts.

Part way through the reception, one of the new priests from the Class of 1991 came up to me, laughing. "Janis," he said, "These cards are for nuns!"

I was baffled. "How can that be? The cards talk about vows and priests make vows."

He kept laughing, saying, "Trust me on this. These are nun cards." Oh well, I was not a Catholic back then. I didn't know.

A Mitre in Your Hope Chest?

A group of seminarians was asked by a professor about their hope for their future. Did they see themselves as future leaders? Did they see themselves as obscure servants?

The place of greatest joy and fulfillment may not be where we think it is. The greatest place of contentment is abiding close to Jesus and following him into the part of the vineyard assigned to us.

The Pope and the Cheerleader

Back in seminary days, one particular second year seminarian, now a distinguished priest, had an uncanny gift of imitating the gestures of Pope John Paul II.

He would hold up his arms, nod and smile in a most cherubic, beneficent manner. At his ordination to the priesthood, while

congratulating him at the door of the church, someone asked him to do his famous imitation of the Holy Father. He graciously declined.

The “cheerleader” was another story. Another of the seminarians, a gifted musician, also had a gift of imitation.

One day in the hallway, he was imitating a cheerleader from a movie. The cheer went something like, “U-G-L-Y, you ain’t got no alibi! You is UGLY!” Years later, upon request, he obligingly repeated the cheer.

This was all done in good humor. Even Pope John Paul II, now a saint, was said to have had an uncanny gift at doing impersonations.

Phone Call from Rome

Poor Terry! I called him in California to tell him about some challenging circumstances in Rome.

It was October, 1989, the fall of my fourth year in the seminary. I was on a pilgrimage organized by the archdiocese, to Medjugorje and Rome.

The permanent deacon and his wife, who were in our group, were staying in the room next door to my room in the hotel in Rome. I remembered something about the deacon’s wife having to have ear plugs. Now I knew why! The wonderful deacon was also a world-class snorer. I just could not sleep.

Then, I could not make the toilet stop running. The handle was up on the wall. European plumbing was beyond me.

I phoned Terry, in California, for advice! I don’t remember what time it was in California, but Terry was very gracious. He told me what to do to the toilet to make it stop running.

Then he advised going to the front desk of the hotel and trying to arrange for another room. This I did, with much arm-waving and trying

to figure out how to convey “snoring” in Italian.

The last couple of days of our time in Rome were wonderful. While in the Vatican, the deacon and his wife arranged for us to have a day in Assisi. Then it was time to go home. I arrived in San Francisco shortly after the earthquake, but that is another story.

Sallie, Grace, and Jack

It was a really busy week-end in March, 1990. After Friday classes in the seminary, Terry took me to the airport so I could fly to Sallie’s parish out of state for a week-end of ministry. Sallie is a dear clergy friend who, at that time, was rector of a beautiful Episcopal church, called Grace.

On Saturday, I gave a Lenten “Quiet Day” (Day of Recollection) at Sallie’s church, Grace Church, preached at both the 8:00 am and 10 am Holy Eucharist services on Sunday at Grace, and then flew back.

In the airport, I saw a NEW YORKER magazine with a pastel painting of a jack-in-the box. I had often felt like “Jack.” Sometimes I had to stay in the box in the darkness and trust that I was serving God with my prayers, studies, waiting, and writing. Sometimes, I was invited to come out of the box and to minister in a more visible way. All that matters is to serve the Lord as the Lord is leads.

The Seminary and the Sidewalk

One of the most rewarding aspects of my time in the seminary was when I would go to a nearby city to pray the rosary and to work with several Catholic friends in an ecumenical ministry. We went literally to the people, on the “sidewalk,” to offer what assistance we could in their crisis situation.

There was a flight attendant, an artist, an attorney, a physicist, and several others in this ministry. I learned so much from them and how they practiced their Catholic faith. Without ever “preaching” to me, their vibrant practice of their Catholic faith impressed me deeply long

before I became a Catholic myself.

Taco Trucks and Lap Swimming

Another wonderful memory of seminary days was the year of taco trucks and lap swimming. A YMCA in a nearby city had a special offer, a one year membership for only \$99!

This was great on days my classes ended early. I could drive away from the seminary, stop at one of the handy taco trucks on the way for a delicious ninety cent taco, go swim it off at the Y, and still get back home to be with Christopher after he got out of school.

Translations of “Live in Berkeley” and “Monastery”

Many years ago, before I entered St. Patrick’s Seminary, I was perplexed about where we would live if I ever went to seminary. Our family lived in Silicon Valley and the seminary I had planned to enter was in Berkeley.

I kept wondering how we could “live in Berkeley.” It just did not seem feasible with Terry’s work and with Christopher’s school right here in Silicon Valley.

Perhaps I would not be able to enter seminary after all in the fall of 1986. That was a summer of praying for guidance.

As it turned out, I did live near the seminary. Very near. Two and a half miles away from Christopher’s school!

What happened? In God’s providence, the doors closed on my entering the seminary in Berkeley and opened to my entering, even though I was not yet a Catholic, the beautiful seminary, St. Patrick’s, in Menlo Park.

Years later, the word “monastery” kept popping up as I prayed. Monastery? What in the world? I didn’t grow up Catholic.

What God was trying to get across to me was very simple. The monastery near the seminary was to become a place of learning to pray in a new way. I was learning to be quiet.

In addition to my involvement in ecumenical prayer group ministry, wonderful though it was over many years, I was also being called to pray in another way. Silence. Solitude. Adoration.

Sometimes it takes awhile to receive God's translations. God is always inviting us into a new realm of wonder and growth.

Here endeth the Cherith stories for now.

Part 2 THE GALILEE and JERUSALEM

These are simple reflections on simple everyday situations. Some are humorous. Others are more serious. They all have to do with my relationship with God. They are not in any precise chronological order.

Sarah Goes to Seminary (Again)

Easter Wednesday, 2002. For the last time I drove Sarah, my faithful friend and road companion, a 1979 Olds Cutlass, to St. Patrick's Seminary.

A seminarian needed a car and Sarah, although old, was still mechanically very sound. I was so happy she would be appreciated and would help a future priest.

Before leaving home, I anointed Sarah with blessed oil from the Jesuit Retreat House and asked Terry to say a prayer. At the seminary, Fr. Bob Gavin and a seminarian also prayed.

Why carry on so about a piece of moving metal? Because Sarah and I go back a long time.

She wasn't always called Sarah. She came to our family in 1980, as a used car. Christopher was five years old and I still have a picture of

him, in his little English schoolboy grey shorts and sweaters, with Sarah in the background. There's another picture of little Christopher in his Superman outfit, with Sarah in the background.

Sarah first went to another seminary in the fall of 1985. On Monday evenings I gritted my teeth and plunged into a once a week three hour class in New Testament Greek, taught by the compassionate Rev. Kent Meads at the Fuller Seminary Extension in Menlo Park.

I made Mondays "Picnic Night" at home, often serving a rotisserie chicken from the JJ&F Market. Easy cooking before I clutched my vocabulary cards, my Greek New Testament, and Exegetical Fallacies, and headed out the door.

In the fall of 1986, by divine providence, I began my studies at St. Patrick's Seminary. At that time I was not a Roman Catholic and believed I would be attending a seminary in Berkeley. When that was not possible, I prayed for guidance all summer. Every time I prayed for guidance, the Holy Spirit would say, "Call St. Patrick's Seminary." "ST PATRICK'S !!! They're CATHOLIC!" The Holy Spirit persisted and one day that summer I called St. Patrick's. The kind person who answered the phone, sensing my terror, asked me to come and talk with the acting Academic Dean. St. Patrick's sheltered me for five fruitful years of study.

In his school years, Christopher took many trips with Sarah. To and from school, from kindergarten on, when he did not take his bicycle. Mid-week trips with friends to Coyote Hills to fly his remote control gliders. Soccer practice. Piano lessons. Trumpet lessons. Scout meetings. One summer, he was a NASA intern. Terry would drive him there in the station wagon in the morning and I would pick him up in the late afternoon. As a hungry teenager, he liked to stop at Mexican restaurants or Hong Kong bakery for huge "snacks" on the way home!

From 1993-94, Sarah and I went to the bus stop at Waverley and Homer for me to catch the Dumbarton Express to Union City. From there I caught the BART to Berkeley for a year's study at another seminary. I would leave Sarah in the parking lot across from St. Thomas Aquinas Church at about 7:15 a.m. Across the street I could see the holy

water font at St. Thomas and I longed to be there. One morning, I could not bear it so I went to Mass and still was able, barely, to catch the bus.

During that same year, Sarah and I also went to East Palo Alto and then across the Dumbarton Bridge to a city in the East Bay where I served as a Field Ed. seminarian in an Episcopal church. On Sundays, Terry and I went there together. I preached on occasion, met with the Confirmation class, and gave Advent and Lenten Days of Recollection.

In the summer of 1994, Sarah and I went to the hospitals where I completed my Clinical Pastoral Education in the Stanford program.

Our group was at the VA location. We also made treks for didactics at the main hospital at Stanford, the Stanford Children's Hospital, and to the Menlo Park VA. The time at the Children's Hospital was very moving. We saw the premature babies and the room with the tiny baptismal garments for emergency baptisms.

Before going to the VA, I drove up the hill to early Mass at the Immaculate Heart Monastery of the Poor Clares and then back down the hill just in time!

Since 1994, Sarah and I have traveled to many ecumenical prayer groups. We've traveled to Mass, met friends for tea, gone to the market, gone to the Palo Alto Y for lap swimming.

Many years of traveling with Sarah. Years associated with family, friends, and ministry.

The name "Sarah" emerged years ago after considering the Sarah of Genesis and her long wait for the promise of Isaac to be fulfilled. Abraham, too, believed, although there seemed to be no reason to believe, that God's promise to him would be fulfilled (Romans 4, 18). The promise was fulfilled with the birth of Isaac. "Sarah then said, 'God hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me (Genesis 21, 6 KJV).'"

Doughnuts and an Axe Murder

I was on the way to the Jesuit Retreat House for a Day of Recollection. It was Ash Wednesday, a day for serious reflection and prayer.

On the way, I passed a doughnut shop and kept driving. Doughnuts, two kinds in particular, used to exert a powerful influence over me!

Congratulating myself that I had resisted the doughnut temptation, I proceeded to the retreat house. Only a few blocks from the doughnut shop, I realized with a pounding heart and with a terrible intensity that, although it was relatively easy to resist a doughnut, it was not so easy to resist harboring angry thoughts.

Old hurts tend to surface, often at unexpected times, as we are endeavoring to draw closer to God. The enemy of our souls loves to torment us.

Yes, it is true that Jesus said that not only murderers will face God's judgment, but also that being angry and insulting others will bring God's judgment (Matthew 5, 21-22). It is also true that God forgives us in the same way that we forgive others (Matthew 6, 12).

God alone can enter the recesses of our hearts and ease the anger that could lead to the kind of rage that could lead to murder. We are dependent of God's grace and mercy at all times. God sees all injustices. God will take care of what concerns us.

Having this flash of insight about myself was a good and healthy way to begin Lent. Better than doughnuts.

Marmalade in the AFTERNOON?!

Many years ago, on our first trip to England, we decided to enjoy afternoon tea in a well-known large department store in London. I did not know the unwritten code about marmalade!

Marmalade was usually offered at breakfast, but not later. Asking for marmalade with the scones brought a shocked expression from the server.

“Marmalade in the afternoon?!” she inquired with a look of shocked disapproval. Strawberry jam, we were informed, was the correct choice.

What happens to us in this life if we do things differently? What happens if we are late bloomers or if we blossom early?

To be true to God and true to ourselves, we have to be willing to be different. Not in an ostentatious way. Not to draw attention to ourselves.

Rather, we need to learn to breathe and live in the God-space we have been given and to do things in the God-time we have been assigned. Maybe marmalade in the afternoon is not so shocking, after all!