

“OUR VALLEY OF TEARS” GLASS HALF-EMPTY OR HALF-FULL?

We could not believe our eyes. This simply could not be happening to us. We drove this far out of our way in order to see this? In the summer of 1969, two months shy of my sixth birthday, our family made a detour to visit Niagara Falls on the way to my grandparents' house in Cape Cod, MA. Much to our chagrin, the American Falls were as dry as an Arizona desert in the summer heat. No, it wasn't a bad drought. In June of that year, the Niagara River was completely diverted away from the American Falls for several months through the building of a temporary rock and earth dam in order to prevent erosion. We did not see as much as a drop of water. See the photo in the sidebar on page five. Sensing our palpable disappointment, I still remember my mother putting forward the best face. “Hey kids, how many people can live to say that they actually saw Niagara Falls when it was shut off? Anyone can see the waterfall, but **only you** were lucky enough to see it this way!” It is in the DNA of mothers to always make the best out of a bad situation. Thanks, Mom!

But it is true that how we choose to view life (glass half-empty vs. half-full) is indicative of how other people evaluate our character as well as how we ourselves view the world. While in the bank on Easter Monday to catch up on some overdue errands, I was patiently waiting in line for my turn. Soon a man appeared next to me, and though I never even had made eye contact, he suddenly blurts out– “This is the slowest bank in the world...I wonder why I still have an account here.” I just smiled and replied, “Well I have had an account here since 1981, and while they could perhaps use another teller, it'll move along.” This stranger was clearly a “glass half-empty” kind of guy. Why the incessant rush?

How do you see yourself? Who among us likes complainers? Who among us wants to listen while other people incessantly complain about their life's daily travail (travail, from the late Latin *trepalium*, an instrument of torture!). Now don't get me wrong. The recognition of life's challenges is not itself tantamount to betraying a lack of faith. Some of the Church's greatest prayers speak of our trials and tribulations this side of the grave. Consider the **Salve Regina**. It is an ancient Marian antiphon dating in its current form to the 12th century, finding its place especially in Cistercian monasteries. It was chanted before bedtime by the assembled monks, and its first strophe speaks of sending up our sighs *in hac lacrimarum valle*, “mourning and weeping *in this valley of tears*.” Hardly a joyous thought on the way to bed! But is the sentiment accurate? I suspect most of us would say “yes,” that we do at times feel as though we are traversing a valley of tears.

And that phrase goes back much farther than the Middle Ages. It appears in some translations of Psalm 84:6. When translated into Latin, the Hebrew phrase was rendered “valle lacrimarum” and Saint Jerome commented on this phrase in several of his works. That reality is balanced by other passages that clearly articulate the attitude proper to followers of Jesus. Consider 1 Peter 3:15-16a, “...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence...” And here's the kicker. If no one ever asks us to give an explanation for our hope, why not? What is it about our demeanor, our attitude and the manner in which we carry ourselves such that no one ever asks us for that explanation? That ought to be all the evidence we need to convict ourselves our need to demonstrate more readily the virtue of hope!

Major holidays and holy days often produce strong emotions in people, and for good reason. Whether it is the first Christmas or Easter without your grandmother, spouse or parent, or whether the troubles at work or school only are heightened by the unwritten rule (perhaps expectation is a better term) that “you should be happy,” these special days often bring a rush of conflicting feelings. Life's difficulties do not and ought not to melt away each time that we celebrate a holiday. Yet, feast days are so vitally important because we do need to break up our life into manageable pieces, and the natural flow of fast days followed by feast days makes good sense, psychologically and theologically. Not everyday can be Easter, even though I love gazing at the sanctuary in all its splendor. But the lilies will eventually fade. Thankfully, not every day is Good Friday either. We need a radical equilibrium in our lives, balancing feasts and fasts, joys and

struggles, idealism and realism.

I see the Church's wisdom in the natural ebb and flow of its liturgical feasts and seasons, as well as the natural change of seasons. I love living in a state that has four seasons, even if the past two winters have been quite wimpy, to say the least. Looking out this Easter to see the grass turning green following the rains on Good Friday and Holy Saturday brought joy to my soul. Let us revel in the joy of these fifty days of Easter, mindful that though a liturgical season cannot completely remove the challenges of life, it does contextualize them in a cohesive manner as we keep our eyes fixed on the reason for our hope, Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.

- I received my DNA test results that I had previously mentioned in this column. Though I claim to be 50% Irish, my DNA suggests 55%! 12% of my DNA was listed as "Iberian Peninsula." However, that designation includes the southern third of France. We know that my mother's side of the family hailed from near Lourdes, France, so again, that makes sense (I had claimed 25% French). But the 21% "Italy/Greece" only confirms my hunch that the test methodology (saliva sample) reflects quite accurately one's favorite foods!
- I am most grateful for the initial response to the **Catholic Services Appeal**. Your generosity is inspiring. I'd still love to surpass last year's totals. There is plenty of time to consider a gift, if you have not yet done so this year.
- On Thursday, at a consistory in the presence of those Cardinals resident or present in Rome, the Holy Father published several decrees relating to the causes of canonization, including for **Blessed Francesco and Jacinto Marto**. They died in 1919 and 1920 respectively. It is so appropriate, as we approach the 100th anniversary of the appearance of the Blessed Mother at Fatima to the three children. Recall, their cousin Maria lived as a cloistered Carmelite nun until her death in 2005.
- **Msgr. Richard Schuler** died ten years ago this past Thursday. He made a monumental contribution towards the preservation of Sacred Music in this Archdiocese and far beyond. It was truly an honor to serve at the parish he pastored for more than thirty years (1969-2001). At Saint Agnes, he was renowned for his orchestral Latin Masses, his quick wit and untiring hospitality. *Requiescat in pace.*

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector

Picture Below: Niagara Falls, Summer of 1969

