

FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING Year A November 23, 2014

Theme: The Least of These

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I am fortunate to have a career in which I often experience the least of these brothers and sisters.

I met Lula Boski when a funeral director called and asked if I would have a service for her husband who had passed away.

She and her husband had no church but there were some Catholic connections somewhere in their past.

After the funeral I began to visit Lula since her only son lived away and she did not get along with her daughter-in-law.

One winter afternoon when I stopped for a visit, Lula's feeble fingers took some time undoing the multiple locks that made her bungalow a bunker.

When the door finally opened, a blast of hot 85 degree air hit my face and reminded me how tough it would be to stay awake in the oven-like living room.

Inside, I reached to give Lula a little hug as always but this time she pulled me close and squeezed her arms around me with more force than I expected from a woman in her late eighties.

What was that all about? I asked.

Lula said, "I'm sorry, but with all the ice and cold this winter, you are the only human person I have seen or touched or talked to in the flesh for over a month. I almost forgot what it felt like."

"Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters, you do for me."

In the middle of a frigid and snowy night, I was rattled from sleep to come to the hospital to anoint the first person I knew who was dying of AIDS.

He was Mexican, about 35 years old and his Mother, Father and about six sisters and brothers were gathered around his bed along with his distraught partner and another friend.

They all cleared the room so he could have the sacrament of reconciliation and then he asked me to send in each member of his family one by one, ending with his mother and his partner.

He talked to each one individually, telling of his love for them.

When he finished, we all gathered around the bed and celebrated the Sacrament of the Sick for him and as we prayed the Lord's Prayer at the end of the Rite, he simply stopped breathing and died.

His was the most precisely orchestrated death I have ever experienced.

“Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters, you do for me.”

Of course not all service of Christ the King is quite so dark.

When Henry was on his medications and sang as part of the congregation at the Cathedral, you'd have thought James Earl Jones was in attendance: booming, rich bass male voice, unashamed of praising the Lord.

But if Henry had not taken his meds he may, as he did, grumble and moan throughout much of the liturgy and then, during the Eucharistic Prayer one Lord's Day, step out into the side aisle, and with a ferocious kick cut loose his lace-less work boot up over the altar and over my head like the pigskin headed for the goal posts.

The second boot did not achieve such height and yours truly had to duck so as to not be felled by Henry's flying size-fourteens.

But Henry's most memorable liturgical ritual happened the Sunday he fell asleep, or so we thought across one of the front pews.

When I invoked the Lord's Prayer, however, Henry jumped to his feet, and into the middle of the center aisle with arms uplifted in prayer, until the very end.

Then, stiff as a steel beam, Henry fell backward, smacking his head on the tile floor with a crack that echoed through the nave of the cathedral.

I rushed down from the altar; a couple of nurses and a doctor in the congregation scrambled to Henry's side.

"Henry, Henry, wake up. Are you all right?"

Henry, without moving a muscle, opened one eye and said: "Don't worry, Father, I'm not dead."

"Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters, you do for me."

One of my very first days in a parish as a seminarian, I received a call from a family who said that their father had died and they had no money to buy any flowers to put around his casket at the funeral home; would I please let them go to a flower shop and buy flowers and have the church pay for them.

Well, I thought, they should have some flowers around dad so I called the flower shop and told them how much the family could spend.

When the pastor came home I told him what I had done and who the family was, he said, "Oh, my Larry, they are the biggest cheats and rip offs in the community. They've got more money than the parish but mooch off everyone. Don't worry. You didn't know."

A couple of weeks later the bill came from the flower shop and the pastor brought it to me laughing; he said: "The got you good, Larry. Look what they bought for old dad."

The bill read: "One bleeding heart plant."

Yes, sometimes we are bleeding hearts, but:

"Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters, you do for me."

Just a couple of weeks ago I was serving at the Table of Hope and a brawny, muscular young man about 28 to 30 old was served like everyone two hot dogs along with baked beans and other veggies.

He ate quickly but then sat at the table politely and quietly; I went to take his empty plate but he held on to it saying, ***"No, I'm going to sit here and wait until we can get seconds. I worked all day outside and two dogs just don't quite fill me up."***

"Whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters, you do for me."