

THE TONIC FOR WHAT AILS YA

“Everyone seems so at peace, Rabbi.”

Nodding, Rabbi Green scans the room. “You’re right, Walt, he says. Usually, you don’t see this kind of peace in a moment like this.”

Approaching the two men, Aliana smiles softly in greeting. “Rabbi ... Mr. Robinson, thank you for coming.”

“Our condolences, Al,” Josh offers as Walt nods his assent. “I was just saying to ‘Hammer’ how peaceful everyone seems. Not the tears I expected.”

“Well, Rabbi, I guess it’s a family strength. My dad always liked a specific Bishop and his words. It’s something he learned from Noni. When she passed away Friday, it was the first thing Dad said to us when we gathered together.”

“Would they be words, this humble Rabbi might be familiar with, Al?” Josh asks, a hint of mischief in his eyes.

Aliana chuckles. “From some of the things I’ve heard you say, Rabbi, they just might be.”

“Let me guess,” Rabbi, Walt says. “Something from the Talmud, or the Torah?”

Josh smiles. “Fraid not Walt. I’m thinking more ... St. Patrick’s Cathedral ... and a man named Sheen.”

“Fulton Sheen ... you’re familiar with the good archbishop?” Walt asks, surprised.

“From my days as a boy in Brooklyn. He had a radio program ... I think it was called ‘Life is Worth Living.’ My mother listened to it all the time.”

“Didn’t know your sainted mother was a clandestine Catholic.”

Josh laughs. “Well, not quite, Walt. The good Bishop was popular across a broad spectrum of people at that time; not just Catholics. He was probably the first great televangelist.”

Aliana turns toward her grandmother’s casket, the look in her eyes, distant, as if seeing the past. “I think Rabbi Josh knows the words Dad referred to, Mr. Robinson,” she says, nostalgia in her voice.”

“And they would be ...?”

Josh smiles softly. “He said, Walt, and I quote, ‘You can’t be grateful and unhappy at the same time.’”

Aliana chuckles softly.

“Exactly, Rabbi ... the very ones.”

Hi, Tony here. It’s Thursday evening. We’re at Ladowski’s funeral home; a wake service for Nick’s mother; Aliana’s grandmother, who passed away last Friday. Mrs. Kossarides was 93 and a more beloved woman you’ll never meet. ‘Noni,’ as she was lovingly known to her family, and many others, was the nucleus around whom the entire Kossarides clan revolved. Her words of wisdom, comfort, and grace, not to mention her fabulous Greek and Old-World baked goods were known to just about everyone in the neighborhood. Especially her baklava ... it was a staple at the Council yard sales. She will be missed.

It’s a simple service this evening; a closed casket and a beautiful spray of roses framing a picture of Mrs. K; one that brings back a memory of a woman with a perpetual smile and a kind word for everyone.

While wake services are generally somber events, yet, this evening’s different. There’s no overwhelming feeling of gloom here tonight. And maybe the Rabbi just hit on an underlying reason. Bishop Sheen’s words are an obvious comfort to Al and her family, and maybe others who are friends of the family. They obviously made an impression on Josh. I think this might be an interesting evening’s conversation, in a place you might not expect it.

What do you say we listen in?....

Nodding his head, a soft smile breaks out on Hammer's face. "Nice thought, he says, I'd never heard it before, though I am familiar with Bishop Sheen. He was an amazing man."

"And what are you three talking about," Father Bob asks, joining Al, Walt and Josh.

"Oh, Aliana was just saying how her dad's words seem to set to tone that allows it to be so peaceful in here tonight," Walt replies.

"And what words are they?"

"Bishop Sheen's ... about gratitude."

"Ah, you can't be grateful and unhappy at the same time ... those the ones?" the priest says, chuckling softly.

"One and the same," Josh says.

"Funny, I used them just the other day."

"Oh, how so?" Bob?

"Well, a friend of Stash's oldest son, Michael, is moving to Omaha. The two boys grew up as close as brothers. They were inseparable. Seems his friend's dad was transferred, and Michael was terribly sad, losing his friend. So much so that his schoolwork suffered. Stash and his wife couldn't get Michael out of his funk, so, he asked me after Mass if there was something I could say to the boy."

"I'd be sad too, if I was exiled to Omaha," Hammer chuckles.

"Hey, don't knock Omaha," Josh laughs. "Nice town, big university ... lots to do., and some of the best steakhouses I've ever eaten in."

"Oh yea," Hammer chuckles, "what's the local synagogue out there, Temple Beth Sirloin?"

Walt's question brings a round of muted laughter as the Rabbi shakes his head.

“Bob, did your words have any effect?” Josh asks after a moment.

“I think so. I reminded him that with today’s technology, they could always keep in touch, and we talked about the difference between being sad and being unhappy. I think he understood. And it seems to make a difference.

“When you think about it, Bishop Sheen’s words are something we should all keep in mind, not just at occasions like this, or the boy’s situation,” Walt says.

“Good point,” Father Bob says.

“You agree, Father?” Aliana asks

“I do, Al. It’s something I often point out; occasionally in my homilies, but especially in counseling. Think about it. So much of the world seems unhappy today.”

The priest pauses a minute. “Well, maybe not so much unhappy as maybe a sense of dissatisfaction in their lives.”

“And you are saying much of this would be alleviated if more people cultivated a habit of gratitude.”

“A habit, no. I’m thinking more of an identity.”

Nodding his head gently, a knowing smile ambles across the Rabbi’s face. “You have a good point, my friend,” he says, softly.

“How do you mean Rabbi?” Aliana asks.

“Well, when I was a boy, President Kennedy, a man so many people, especially young people, loved, was killed by an assassin. It was a time of incredible sadness; something we could do nothing about. Yet, as the days went on, we realized, though through our sadness, we were also grateful for his time as president, and the impact he had on our lives.”

“So, you’re saying sad and unhappy are not the same thing?”

“Exactly, Al. Sadness often comes from something external, something we can’t control.” Unhappiness is a feeling from within, something we can. Think

about it. How many marriages would be so much happier if partners concentrated on being grateful for the other, instead of finding fault?”

“Or in our work lives,” adds Walt. Heck, all we read about is how the majority of people hate their jobs. Maybe a little gratitude for having a means of providing for ourselves and our families would go a long way?”

All nod in agreement with Walt’s words.

“Or kids,” says Father Bob. “If they are not overly rebellious, promiscuous, injurious to themselves and to others, be grateful, knowing full well that they’re awakening to the world around them, to themselves, and their place in it. And they’re going to make mistakes. Gratitude goes a long way in making parenthood, a time of joy.”

And express that gratitude to them,” Nick adds, joining the group and overhearing the priest’s words. With kids, it goes a long way.

Nodding, Father Bob smiles. “Gratitude is a powerful medicine, but like all medicines, one must understand it,” he says. It doesn’t necessarily banish sadness; and actually, it shouldn’t. We need to feel sad at a loss or a genuine sorrow. Grief is healthy and normal. But gratitude is the starting point not only in driving out both the sadness, and any feeling of unhappiness. But to putting that loss in perspective to allow us to move forward.”

“Bob’s right,” Rabbi Josh, says, nodding in agreement. “It takes the sting out of life.”

“We all need to be a little more grateful for those in our life who help us to grow, in body and soul, Even if that help sometimes comes with a sting.” Father Bob says, smiling at Aliana.

“And to grow in love...” Aliana says, softly, looking at Mrs. K’s picture ...

Like Noni...”

In a world where an almost endless array of technology exists to make our daily lives happy, healthy, and fulfilled, why is it more and more people seem perpetually unhappy? That moments of joy, or even simple happiness, are the exception, not the rule.

Might the words of the bishop be the perfect tonic to cure this “sickness” of perceived neglect and misery so many people are burdened with?

“One cannot be grateful and unhappy at the same time.”

Priceless words

... Words to live by?

Thinkaboutit ... I’m Tony Baggz.

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