

It's amazing how a plate of blueberry pancakes and a cup of coffee can get the ole grey matter going. Theology at the breakfast table ... an interesting concept.

HIDDEN MEANINGS

“You see, Bob, that’s just my point.”

“And that point is, Orville?”

“Your Jesus had an awfully strange sense of justice.”

Stephanie O’Malley, Father John’s teenage daughter, sets another plate of blueberry pancakes on the table, interrupting the conversation. Looking up at her, the Colonel winks and smiles. **“Please, young lady, give my compliments to the chef. These are outstanding.”**

“You can tell him yourself, Mr. K,” the teen says, smiling back and looking over Orville’s shoulder. **“He’s standing right behind you.”**

“Tell me what?” Walt Robinson asks

“Your secret for these pancakes,” Rabbi Josh says. **“They’re magnificent.”**

Chuckling, a sneaky look ambles across Walt’s face.

“Secret ingredient, rabbi?” ... Walt asks with a wink. **“Holy water.”**

Reaching for the syrup bottle, Father Bob chuckles. **“Take that to the bank, Orville,”** he says. **“Hammer takes great pride in his culinary creations.”**

The colonel sets down his fork and looks across the table at St. Kate’s pastor. **“But back to my point,”** he says, **“that incident you read this morning ... that’s the one I was talking about a couple weeks ago. Remember, on the porch?”**

“Right. The one about the workers in the vineyard. You’re saying that story proves your point.”

“Right! I’m not sure Jesus had a handle on the concept of justice.”

Picking up his coffee cup, Father Bob looks out the window at some children playing on the swings and smiles. "Then again, Orville ...

...maybe we don't always have a handle on His?"

Hi, It's Tony. It's breakfast Sunday here at St. Kate's. When Sunday school classes are in session, breakfast is served after the morning masses in the church hall. The cost is nominal and it's a chance for friends to "break bread" together.

This morning finds Mr. Orville Krankus and Rabbi Josh guests of Father Bob. Walt Robinson is the head chef. "Bullets", Nunzio, "Pretzels", Samantha Bates, "Ace", and Uncle Joey round out the kitchen crew, and several wives and teens act as hostesses and helpers. "Hammer's" in charge because he has a secret recipe for blueberry pancakes we think even the CIA is after.

As he and Rabbi Green occasionally do, the two join friends for these special Sunday a.m. breakfasts. And, Mr. K came to the early service. The colonel admits he's pretty nonchalant about religion, though he occasionally attends the 9:00 a.m. mass. Especially on Sundays when blueberry pancakes are on the after-mass menu.

Seems, though, this morning's reading has him a bit agitated. It's the story of the workers in the vineyard; some working all day, some only an hour, with each receiving the same pay. Doesn't seem fair to the colonel. Knowing Mr. K and the discussions he's engaged in over time with Father Bob and Father John, this one ought to be interesting.

What's say we listen in?

"How can you justify that, Father?" Orville asks. "The idea that one person should be paid the same amount for an hour's work as those who slaved all day in the hot sun? It's patently unjust."

"Is it ... to whom?"

“I’d think that’s obvious.”

“Well, on the surface, I’d have to agree with you,” the priest says. “The thing is, Jesus was never concerned with just the surface of things.”

“How so?”

“Maybe, to the Creator, the reward for one’s work is more than a pocket full of silver coins.”

Consternation mixed with confusion clouds the Colonel’s face.

“And what reward would that be?”

“Maybe the understanding of the real meaning of a day’s work ... and an evolving understanding of the nature of heaven.”

The colonel chuckles. “The nature of heaven ... okay, ya got me, I gotta hear this.”

“Orville, maybe what Christ is telling us is several things ... on different levels. Most everyone understands the story as an allegory for the justice and mercy of God the Father; a generosity that is His to give. But dig deeper and there’s more.”

“I’m listening.”

“Well, there’s the satisfaction of a day’s work. The knowledge that one uses one’s talents and abilities to be productive and creative, as God is productive and creative. To understand the dignity and worth of performing a task that benefits not only oneself, but others. Again, it goes to the fact we are made in the image and likeness of a productive and creative God. Given that thought, work is sacred. Taking it to heart, the workers who labored all day received something more than just a day’s pay. In fact, one might feel sorry for the workers who came in the late afternoon.”

“How so?” the colonel asks.

“Because they don’t realize the satisfaction of having completed a task and produced a product to be proud of. They end up with money, but no satisfaction greater than something that’s here today and gone tomorrow.”

“And if that’s all they want?”

“Then they shortchange themselves on a much deeper level.”

“I guess I see where you’re going with this,” Mr. K says, a hesitant tone creeping into his voice.

“I like to think that there were workers who did not grumble because they truly understood what the day’s pay was really worth ... what it truly represented,” the priest says. “And that’s where the third level of understanding comes in.

“And that is...?” the colonel asks.

“The habit of Jesus to take the listener beyond just the surface. In this case, the idea he is trying to put across, just may be the beginnings of the glimpse of the nature of heaven.”

“The nature of heaven,” Mr. K asks, a puzzled look in his eyes.

“Exactly, Orville. Heaven just might be the ultimate revelation of the old adage, ‘you get out of something what you put into it’.”

“Go on,” the Colonel says, a look of intrigue lighting up his eyes.

“Well, it’s a basic tenet that all who die in God’s good grace will enter that eternal life with Him. On that basis, everyone will be equal. From the great Saints to the guy who repents on his deathbed. All will live in that eternal life with God.”

“But, you’re saying there’s something further?”

“Yes, understanding, realization. The person who has lived a life of faith, love, and service to the will and the law of God, might far more richly understand and appreciate the joy of heaven, than someone who has little appreciation of Jesus’s words, ‘store up treasure in heaven, for where your riches may be, so is your heart.’ Think about it, Jesus is saying, in effect, you can’t make up for lost time, spiritually.”

Silence ensues as the Colonel says nothing, pondering the priest’s words.

“Orville, think of it this way,” Father Bob continues. “Maybe it’s something like the Masters Golf tournament.”

An involuntary chuckle escapes Mr. K’s lips. “This I’ve got to hear.”

A devilish look crosses Father Bob's face. "Okay," he says, "we both play the occasional round of golf, right. I mean, I've seen that 'Captain Kirk' slice of yours. Boldly going where no man has gone before."

Feigning a wounded look, Mr. K shakes his head. "Thanks, Bob ... that hurts. You'll pardon me when I laugh next time you four putt a green."

"Touché," the priest chuckles. Then, sipping his coffee, he continues.

"Anyway, think of the Masters as an analogy for heaven. A man who has absolutely no appreciation for the game of golf, never played it, never watched it, is given a ticket as a gift. He enters and marvels at the beauty of the surroundings, the sights, the joy and the camaraderie of the other attendees. But his understanding, his appreciation of what is taking place is severely limited. Then there are those with various degrees of interest in the game. They enjoy the same feeling but understand the surroundings better. And so it goes. Right up to those who lived their life playing the game. Their understanding and appreciation is the most profound. Still, everyone is happy with their portion, for themselves and for all others; each filled completely ... satisfied perfectly. No jealousy, no regret."

"And you are saying it may be that way in the next life?"

"Exactly ... because each soul understands God's perfect justice. Each understands he or she is being given precisely what they asked for."

Mr. K laughs. "Well, if you're right, I gotta work on my game. Don't want to clobber Saint Pete with an errant tee shot."

A twinkle lights up Father Bob's eye. "Good thinking, Orville," he laughs. "Do something like that and you might end up, not at the Masters, but someplace else ...

... say someplace much warmer, and a lot less green?

In the prayer taught by Jesus, we say to the Father, "thy will be done." At our final judgment, God will say to each of us, "thy will be done." Our God will give us exactly what we have asked for.

Makes you wonder, doesn't it? Do you really want to be just another bystander in life? Just put in your one hour ...

... and reap the fruits of your efforts?

Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.

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