

A Catholic priest dances with his wife ... again...

At This Moment

“Father John ... that song ... it has a special meaning?”

Startled, the priest chuckles and snaps back to reality. “Sorry, Nick ... got lost for a moment,” he says, a ‘you caught me’ look on his face. “Laura and I loved it. I remember we danced to it at a club like Mike’s Place just a couple of days before she went into the hospital.”

Nick smiles. “I’ve always liked it too. So does Andrea. That man is definitely singing from his heart.”

“That he is,” the priest says, nodding his head slightly. “And it has an even deeper meaning for me ... and for all of us, I’d say.”

“How do you mean ...?” Bobby “Pretzels” asks.

“It brings so much into focus.”

“Again, how so?” Nick asks

“Well, Nick, because if God sang a song to us, He might use words something like these.”

Hi, I’m Tony Baggz. We’re here in the rectory at St. Kate’s. It’s poker night and Father Bob was the big winner last week ... brought home the grand total of sixty-five cents. So, it’s his turn to host. However, the good pastor got called to the hospital.

Nick Kossarides, “Uncle” Joey, and Bobby “Pretzels” showed up early and seems they’ve caught Father John in the middle of setting the refreshments out. They walked in on the priest staring off in space, a pitcher of iced tea in one hand, a tray of cheese and crackers in the other; listening to the stereo playing the song ... “At this Moment.”*

For those of you new to our neighborhood, Father John was married once. He lost his beloved Laura about twelve years ago and found a second calling to the ministry. His love for his lady,

though, is still very much alive in his heart and soul – as it should be, and Billy’s song evidently brought back a memory. Something I think the three men find intriguing. Knowing these guys, and Father John’s penchant for exploring hidden meanings, we could be in for an interesting conversation. Hey, look, Rabbi Green just walked in the door.

What do you say we listen in? ...

Pretzels chuckles and raises an eyebrow. “Please, Father ... explain ... ya gotta admit, from the lyrics, it’s a strange love song.”

“Well, once when we were dating, Laura wanted to break it off. I didn’t want to and this song was popular at the time. I talked her out of it, and it sorta became our song.”

A furtive smile ambles across Bobby’s face. “But knowing you, Father, I get the feeling it means something more?” he says.

“Yea, Bobby, you see, in God’s time, we’ll live that moment again. I’ll hold her again and dance across heaven’s ballroom floor.”

“Because...?”

“Because that song will be playing in God’s time ... this moment ... this eternal present moment.”

“God’s understanding of time?” Joey says, a knowing smile in his eyes.

Father John returns Joey’s smile, saying nothing and slowly nodding his head.

“And that understanding is ...?” Bobby asks.

“That the only place we can live with God is in this present moment.”

“Ah, a very important idea in Jewish thinking,” Rabbi Josh adds.

“How so, rabbi?” Nick asks.

“It’s a question the Rabbis of old posed. What is the most important time in history?”

“The Exodus,” Bobby says tentatively.

“No.”

“Yom Kippur ... Rosh Hashanah?” Nick asks, softly.

“No.”

“What then?”

“... this present moment. It is sacred,” Josh says, softly.

“You know, many people, if they even consider it at all, fail to understand time as it relates to our God, Joey says. They consign The Eternal to our finite understanding of past, present, and future.”

Father John and Rabbi Josh nod in unison; recognition of a shared understanding, as an inquisitive look ambles across Nick’s face.

“So, Joey,” Nick says, “how do you explain time in our relationship with God in your RCIA classes? If you do.”

“Simple, He is an eternal being; not constrained by our experience of past and future. An understanding emphasized by the name he gives Himself to Moses on Sinai; I Am.”

“God doesn’t understand our past or our future?” Bobby asks.

“Understand, Bobby, ... yes ... subject to them, no. All of eternity is present to God in this single present moment, and it is in this moment we are present to Him. Our God is omniscient, that is ‘all knowing.’ And it is the only time we can live with Him. We cannot plead our past actions or future intentions as justification for our present worth.”

Nodding, Father John pours himself a cup of coffee. “You can’t do what a lot of people today find themselves doing, he says.”

“And that is?”

“Well, I’m thinking of the person who’s a prisoner of guilt, believing past actions render them beyond God’s salvation ... beyond His mercy. Sure, our past is known to God, but it’s not His desire we remain in that pain, hurt, or sorrow. He desires us to choose His law and His love; to break the chains of the past, and live a life of hope, faith, joy, and love of ourselves, and others, now, in this present moment. God sees us as He created us; in His own image and likeness, not a shattered soul, unworthy of His love.”

Sipping his coffee, the priest pauses as Joey takes up the conversation.

“And the idea of God’s time is critical to our understanding of the faith we share and our belief in, and understanding of, our sacraments, Bobby. Especially, the Eucharist.”

“How so?”

“As I said, all eternity is present to God in this single present moment. Jesus’ action, two thousand years ago is present to God, right now.”

On Bobby’s face is the look of a light going on in. “And what is present to God in this moment, even though it happened for us almost two thousand years ago, he makes present to us, he says”

“Exactly, Pretzels. Listen to the priest’s words of consecration; ‘Lord let your spirit come upon these gifts like the dewfall, so that they may become the body and blood of your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ.’”

“Whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you,” Bobby says.

“And in that moment, the Lord becomes actually present on the altar,” Nick says, quietly ... “because that moment in time, almost two thousand years ago in our time, is present to God now. And He makes what is present to Him, present to us at our request ... a re-presentation of that Last supper, two thousand years ago.”

“It’s as if we are approaching that table in that upper room with the Lord, and the twelve apostles,” Bobby says quietly, the amazement of a man realizing something for the first time in his voice. “Taking the bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord, from the priest.”

“... Who stands in the person of Christ; in persona Christi, as the church teaches,” Joey says quietly.

The kitchen falls quiet.

“Then how about eternal punishment?” Rabbi Josh asks, after a moment.

“Well, Josh, if living with God is in the present moment, separation from Him is also the present moment ... a moment that is unending.”

Pausing, a smile breaks over the priest's face. "And, that is a danger for those having a seriously flawed understanding of God's time."

"And that understanding is?" Josh chuckles, the look in his eyes betraying a shared secret.

"... believing one can continue to live contrary to God's law and then make it all up at the last minute," Father John laughs.

"You mean, like the person who goes on a ninety-day diet to lose twenty pounds, makes no changes, then thinks they can make it up the last week," the rabbi says, a devilish twinkle in his eyes ...

... "I've been there. And I can tell you ...

... it doesn't work."

"You're thinking as man thinks, not as God thinks, Peter." Our Lord's words.

Hell is eternal separation from God. Has a person consigned to Hell been sentenced to unending suffering as we understand time? Or merely be granted one's choice to live apart from God for a moment ... one that is unending?

Isn't divine justice, simply granting us what we ask for?

In our journey with and to Him, this present moment is all that is available to us. Turn our back on God in this moment and we live apart from Him. Until we choose another present moment to reverse that choice. And it is a choice.

One we all must make ...

... in this moment.

Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.

*At this Moment – Billy Vera and the Beaters, 1981, written by Billy Vera.

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