

An "unusual" saint leads a young man to the understanding of an unfortunate truth.

Saint Robert

"Better dress warm, Paul. Can't be much more than freezing out there."

"Sure Dad. Mr. Farrell wanted to check the stream conditions. Be back in a bit."

The door closes behind Nick Kossarides' oldest son, Paul.

What's up with him?" "Ace" Martinson asks, turning to Nick. "He's usually like a chimp with a sugar buzz up here."

"Ah, kid's had a rough week."

"How so?"

"Well, last Friday he submitted a school project ... worked on for months. It was really good. And Monday it got turned down flat."

"Project?" Father Bob asks.

"A music project, padre; he was really proud of it, too. They rejected it didn't even tell him why."

Getting up from his chair, Rabbi Green quietly walks out the door. Shaking his head, Dom sips his coffee and looking out the window says softly ... to no one in particular ...

"... welcome to the real world, kid."

Hi, I'm Tony Baggz. It's late September, five-thirty a.m., early morning light filters through the cabin windows and though there's a chill in the air the day promises to be warm. Nick Kossarides owns a cabin here on Monastery Run and this week

he's stuffed eight guys into a building already crowded with four. But comfort is no issue when the steelhead are running. Steelhead, for the unenlightened, are rainbow trout that migrate to larger waters, grow large, and return to freshwater to spawn. The guys look forward to this trip all year.

Nick, his son Paul, Father Bob, Jack 'Gumshoe' Farrell, Rabbi Josh, Vinnie 'Bullets', 'Ace' Martinson, and Dominick Ferrelli came up for a couple days fishing. Nice to see "Dom" join the guys. Seems business has been slow for him lately, giving him a chance to get away for a few days. Now, for most people, business being slow is a problem. Not for Dom. You see, he's a homicide detective with the State Police, so when business is slow for him ... it's a good thing.

The cabin's busy. Fishing gear is being assembled, favorite lures chosen, a hasty breakfast eaten, and a buzz of anticipation fills the air. Well, for everyone but Paul. Like Ace said, the young man is usually a whirlwind, but today he's moping a bit. He's gone outside with "Gumshoe" to check the stream conditions ...

... Wait a minute, Paul's just returned. I'm interested to hear how the day will play out. What do you say ...

... Let's listen in.

"How's the stream running, Paul," Dom asks.

"... waters up a bit, Mr. Ferrelli. ...fishing's goin' to be spotty for a while but it'll get better as it clears. My guess ... attractor flies early but we'll probably have more success with streamers and eggs later on."

"Well ... no need to rush, I guess," Nick says. "Time for another cup of coffee and a few more winks."

"So Paul, how'd the competition go?" Ace asks. "Wasn't it last week or something?"

"Yea, Mr. Martinson. I didn't get to audition ... never made it past the first look."

“Any reason?”

“Yea, they said it violated all the rules ... tradition ... that sort of thing. Guess they just wanted the same ole stuff.”

A couple minutes pass, the cabin door opens, and Rabbi Josh walks back in. Taking the seat next to Paul, he smiles and slides a large flat package to him. “Here my young friend, I was saving this for another time, but somehow right now seems more appropriate.”

Unwrapping the package, Paul pulls out a couple of record albums, old vinyl discs; ‘The Times They Are a-Changin’ and ‘Highway 61 Revisited,’ ... early Bob Dylan works.

“Awesome,” the teen says, a smile breaking out on his face. ... “thanks Rabbi. How’d you know?”

“Your dad told me you collect vintage music and you were looking for some of Dylan’s early stuff. My son’s a music producer. I asked him if he could find a couple of copies.”

A cough interrupts the conversation. Heads turn to see a playful look of mock indignation on Father Bob’s face. “Vintage! ... vintage,!! Thanks, Josh; nice to know I’m ‘vintage’. I was a teenager when those albums came out.”

“Hate to tell you, Bob, but you’ve been vintage for a while,” Josh chuckles, a devilish grin creasing his face. “But hey, don’t feel bad ... with all the grey hair here, you’re not alone.”

Shaking his head, the priest mutters softly to himself and returns to his plate of steak and eggs.

“There’s something there you might want to take to heart,” Josh says, turning his attention back to Paul.

“...take to heart, Rabbi?”

“Yea ... seems nowadays everybody’s settling for vanilla ice cream.”

“Vanilla ice cream? ... I don’t get it.”

“Let me ask you ... what’s today’s most popular musical show?”

“I don’t know ... American Idol, I guess.”

“Right. And what’s the objective of American Idol ... besides selling lots of advertising?”

“To discover the next big star ...”

“... who sings what other people tell him to sing, right?”

“Yea ...” Paul says, tentatively.

“And who wins? The most creative artist or the one who satisfies someone else’s dictates?”

“... someone who does what other people tell him.”

“You’re a student of music, right? Tell me, who’s had the biggest impact on music in the last few generations?”

“Umm ... the Beatles?”

“Good choice, Lennon and McCartney were great songwriters. But in the beginning, they weren’t much more than any really good garage band. Sure, eventually they branched out ... Sgt Pepper, the White Album ... the Eastern influence ... but they couldn’t have succeeded unless someone paved the way. And that someone was?”

Silence.

Chuckling softly, Josh nudges Paul’s shoulder. “You’re holding him in your hand,” he says.

Another brief moment passes. Then an embarrassed smile. “Duh ... pardon my clueless, Rabbi,” Paul says, shaking his head. “Dylan, of course. ‘Saint Robert of Hibbing’ I’ve heard him called.”

“Right. Before Dylan, music was simple ... boy meets girl, boy loses girl ... that kind of thing. Now along comes Dylan and turns music on its ear. He introduces poetry, protest, iconoclasm, and social consciousness.”

“Yea, I can see that,” Paul says, nodding and turning the albums over in his hands.

“And think about Dylan and awards. In his early years he never received one. The critics ridiculed him ... his lyrics ... his voice ... his looks. He didn’t

fit the mold. But eventually he succeeded because others with vision took his work, made it their own, and had big hits.”

“Like the Byrds.”

“Right ... Mr. Tambourine Man, My Back Pages. Or Peter, Paul, and Mary ... Blowin’ in the Wind ... they saw the value in his work. And eventually, the public did too.”

Josh pauses as Paul turns the album over to read the back cover.

“Paul ... people who make big changes ... take quantum leaps ... call them ‘innovators’ ... they have to work harder, longer, better just to be heard. And they never have an easy time of it. It takes time ... and persistence. It’s that way in everything, not just music.”

“So, you’re saying people who want to do things differently will always have to fight those who want to keep things just the way they are?”

“Yea, get used to it. People are afraid of things that rock their safe and familiar world. Like your composition. It was outside their comfort zone, so they never gave it a chance. That’s just the way it is with people like that.”

Understanding lights up Paul’s eyes. “Yea, maybe ... maybe you’re right Rabbi.”

Smiling, Josh clasps Paul on the shoulder.

“Now ask yourself this...

... Could Bob Dylan have won American Idol?”

Nowhere in the history of the world, has Easter Sunday ever come before Good Friday.

Abraham Lincoln failed at almost everything he tried before becoming President. Thomas Edison failed countless times before inventing the light bulb. The discovery of the America was a mistake on Columbus’ part. Heck, even the Pittsburgh Steelers were a losing football team for almost forty years, and then won four World Championships in six. The examples are endless.

To get knocked down, give up, and quit; that's failure. Every thing else is a learning experience ...

... or an opportunity.

The people of God, from the earliest times have been attacked and even killed for their faith. To the world, in His time, the greatest failure was, as Rabbi Josh calls Him, 'The Carpenter from Nazareth.' A man, who found himself abandoned and humiliated, nailed to the ultimate sign of disgrace and failure, a cross. Yet the horror of that moment soon faded before the power and the glory of God.

It's the same today. Stand up for Christian values in a world working overtime to convince itself those values no longer exist, and you may well be marginalized, ridiculed, and shunned. It never ends ... that's just the way it is.

After all, to play on the Rabbi's words ...

... Bob Dylan would have been laughed off American Idol.

Thinkaboutit... I'm Tony Baggz.