

Do Christians need another Pentecost? An interesting conversation asks that question.

Note: The following episode uses a number of nicknames. For those just joining us, in the Archives section further down on this page, the episode entitled "Names" might be helpful in shedding some light, here. Also, in this episode you will meet a young man named Andy whose nickname is "Alabama." The episode in the Reruns section following this current episode will again, shed some light.

BLENDING IN

“Look mommy, that man just made a touchdown!”

Heads turn to see a little tyke at the corner table pulling on his mom’s sleeve and pointing to Uncle Joey. Seems a tiny voice just interrupted the blessing before a meal.

Flustered, mom grabs the little guy’s hand, trying to quiet him. “Hush, Damien, the man is saying grace.”

“What’s grace, Mommy?”

“Hush, now !”

“I’ll tell you when we get home.”

Hi, Tony here. It’s late November here and we’re in Spinelli’s. The leaves of autumn are a memory as a chill wind blows a page of a discarded newspaper down the street. Looming ominously, thick grey clouds, scud across the sky and snow flurries swirl around the few people on the sidewalks. The “Boys in Black” are playing in California and as is customary on the Sunday afternoon of an away game, the gang is gathered in Spinelli’s back room for the Sunday afternoon football feast.

Sammy “Bagels”, Rabbi Green, Father Bob Scanlon, Pastor Randall, Reverend Williams, Reverend

Billy Swanson, and most of the usual gang and their wives are seated around several large tables overflowing with trays of antipasto, capicola, several cheeses, pizzas, pepperoni and sausage rolls, calzones strombolis, and my favorite, Carmine's famous sausage lasagna.

Oh, and I know what you're thinking. Sammy, the Rabbi, and all this food? Don't worry, Father Bob had some chicken salad, Jewish rye, lox, and bagels sent over from Asher's deli. So, everything's kosher! well, in a manner of speaking. The party's in full swing and a little blonde curly-headed fellow just intruded on the festivities.

Let's listen in!

Leaning over, Bagels winks at little Damien. "No Sparky, that wasn't a touchdown. He was telling the waitress to steal second base," he says in his best conspiratorial tone.

The look on the little guy's face is priceless. He's looking at Bagels like he's nuts. Of course, I can't blame the little guy; I've known Sammy for years, and he gets that reaction a lot. With Bagels, you never know what's coming next.

"Don't worry ma'am! happens all the time," Sammy says to the little guy's mother while chuckling at the look on the little guy's face. "People are always mistaking that gesture for the touchdown signal. I know, and I'm Jewish."

Shaking her head, the tyke's mom laughs. "Jewish? Let me guess, the pepperoni here's kosher?"

"Well, maybe not the pepperoni, but this man owns the place and swears everything else is. Right Spinelli?"

No answer. Seems Nunzioâ€™s caught up in the action on the big screen.

"Nunzio?"

"Yea | whatever, Bagels."

Sammy and the tykeâ€™s mom share a laugh. "Kosher pepperoni pizza. What's next, Swedish tacos?" she asks. Then, picking up her son, she looks at the table and smiles. "Again, fellas, sorry for the interruption," and turns back to her little ones.

A look of concern crosses Tommy McMichael's face. "Whereâ€™s Alabama and his dad? I talked to Andy on Thursday and he said they were coming this afternoon."

"Sorry Tommy," Crazy Pat says, setting down his glass, "I forgot to tell you. Andyâ€™s dad called last night while you were studying. He said they couldn't make it today. He thinks Andy might be coming down with something."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Nah, probably just a cold. But Pete thought it best they stay home today."

Wiping some "gravy" off his chin, Vito looks across the table at Tommy. "Yea, Mountain, we sent a pizza over just before you got here. Pete ordered his usual. Said Andy wasn't feeling good and they were going to stay in. He didn't seem too concerned. Probably just a cold coming on," he said.

Satisfied, Tommy sits back in his chair. "Well, thatâ€™s good. But Iâ€™ll bet Andyâ€™s not too happy. He lives for these afternoons."

John Randall glances out the window at the flurries in the air, a wistful look in his eyes. "Sure wish I was there. In California I mean; looks warm and sunny."

Setting down his fork, Billy Swanson looks at his friend. "John, look around | what do you see? Great food, a fire in the fireplace, good friends; what could be warmer than this?"

Sheepishly, the Lutheran minister looks at his counterpart from down the street, then smiles. "Walk off, all I can say is when you're right, you're right," he says, raising his glass in a toast.

Bullets holds up his slice of pepperoni and extra cheese. "Yea, your holiness, ask yourself, do they have anything this good out there?"

"No way, padre," Gumshoe laughs. "Out there it's all sprouts and sushi. Can't find good gnocchi, pierogi, or stromboli anywhere."

"Don't forget the cappicola," Father Bob says, chuckling at the exchange.

Pausing, the priest sips his coffee. "I can understand the little guy's confusion, though. After all, how many people say grace in a restaurant nowadays? Heck, it seems more wide receivers cross themselves in the end zone than diners before a meal in public these days."

Setting down his slice of pepperoni, Pastor Swanson shakes his head. "I don't know, Bob. Maybe there's more than you think. A lot of my congregation are adamant about expressing their faith in public, regardless of what others think. Or if it makes them uncomfortable."

Joey raises his glass in a toast. "Good for them, your eminence. But Fr. Bob's question's still on the table. Why are believers reluctant to express their faith in public?"

"... your eminence?" Billy says, shaking his head and smiling. "Think I'll be saying the blessing in Latin next

time, Joey?" the evangelical minister asks, mischief in his eyes.

"Heavens no, Bill," Rabbi Green laughs, "Martin, Bob and I are betting on Hebrew."

Dropping his chin to his chest, Billy shakes his head and laughs softly to himself. Then, composing himself, he looks over at the priest. "But back to your question, though, Bob. Why are believers reluctant to express their faith? If you ask me, I'd say because it makes others uncomfortable."

"Or it makes believers themselves uncomfortable?" Gumshoe asks, sipping his drink. "Don't most people think it's easier to reserve an outward expression of faith for the privacy of the home and just blend in with the wallpaper when out in public?"

It's Father Bob's turn to raise his glass.

"Touché, Jack. But isn't that the issue? Are we supposed to just make other people comfortable? Just blend in as you say, and not make waves? Or should we be unafraid to express our faith, regardless of public opinion. Even if it disturbs someone else's comfortable little world?"

"That we are, Bob," Billy says. "Making people comfortable was the last thing our Lord was concerned with. If His words or actions made others itch, that was their problem. We should realize that actively living out our faith means others will feel uncomfortable. And they may scoff or marginalize us for it; it comes with the territory."

"That it does my friend | that it does," the priest says.

" | thirty | twenty | ten | he's gonna go | all | the | way | touchdown!! Jenkins takes it to the house!!"

The sound of the play-by-play announcer jolts the room's attention back to the giant screen. The prize rookie just ran a punt back seventy-two yards and the Boys in Black take a seventeen-point lead. Cheering erupts and glasses are raised in toast. "Pour it on," Carmine says, raising his glass and laughing |

| don't want them to blend back in.

"All evil needs to triumph is for good men to do nothing." It may be a cliché, but it points to a basic truth | and issues a challenge. Truth demands that people of faith make their beliefs known in the public square. Not only in small things like a blessing before a meal in a restaurant, but also at public meetings, forums, and debates. And especially at the ballot box.

The public expression of the beliefs of God's people contributes to the public discourse and to remain silent denies the world an important point of view; one badly needed today. Those who scorn the Creator and His laws would like nothing more than for believers to remain on the sidelines of public discourse, anonymous, silent, just blending in. And to do so caves in to those who see silence as acquiescence and a license to monopolize the social and moral conversation. A monopoly that opens a Pandora's Box of evil that slowly rots the basic foundations of a healthy society.

Gandhi, the great man of peace and justice was educated at Oxford, in England, a Christian nation. He was once reputed to have said that he liked Christ, he just didn't like Christians. They were so unlike their Christ." Kind of makes you wonder if he came across too many people who were trying to just |

| blend in.

Think about it | I'm Tony Baggz.

An kindred thought to the above conversation from the eminent Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Â· The refusal to take sides on great moral issues is itself a decision. It is a silent acquiescence to evil. The Tragedy of our time is that those who still believe in honesty lack fire and conviction, while those who believe in dishonesty are full of passionate conviction.

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