

Roses, lilies, tulips, daisies, and carnations all need roots. So does ...

## **CORSAGE CHRISTIANITY**

“My, don’t you look elegant, Scott.”

“Thank you, Mrs Spinelli. May I introduce my date, Ashley?”

“So nice to meet you, Ashley,” Tiffany says. “That’s a beautiful dress. And what a lovely corsage.”

“Thank you, ma’am. Scott’s mom made it.”

“Then congratulate her for me, Scott. Your mom’s quite talented.”

Smiling, Ashley takes Scott’s arm as they enter the ballroom. “Who are they?” she asks. The look on her face is as if she’d just seen a three headed duck.

Rolling his eyes, Scott looks at her.

“The Gestapo.”

Kids !! ....

... Hi, I’m Tony ... We’re here tonight at the main ballroom of one of the city’s finest hotels. Tonight’s event, the Prom. The kids are from St. Peter’s Catholic High School and St. Mark’s Episcopal Academy. The two schools decided to combine their prom so that they could afford the large ballroom and a few additional luxuries to make the event more memorable.

**The idea to do it this way was to control costs for the kids, or maybe better, the parents, and it's worked out well for both schools. St. Peter's is a bit larger school; about five hundred students. St. Mark's is smaller, around three fifty. The two don't compete in athletic events as they're in different leagues, so there's no real rivalry between them and the kids get along quite well. That's a tribute to Father Bob and Reverend Daniels.**

**A number of adult chaperones greet the young men and women as they arrive. There's Reverend Daniels, the rector at St. Marks, Father Bob Scanlon and Father John O'Malley of St. Kate's parish, Nick Kossarides and his wife, Andrea, "Uncle" Joey and Sam Bates, Tiffany Spinelli, and Kristi Martinson. The clergymen like to greet the kids but they'll leave shortly. The others will stay the evening, remaining as unobtrusive as possible.**

**It's nine and most of the kids are here. The adults have retreated to a side office and, as is their habit, make their own interesting comments on the kids and the goings on.**

**Let's listen in ...**

**"That dress on the Callaghan girl; now that's a fashion statement," Sam says, laughing softly.**

**"You mean a fashion risk," Tiffany chuckles.**

**"Oh, I don't know, I kinda like it," Father Bob says.**

**Shaking his head, Reverend Daniels chuckles softly. "This from a man who wears black, 24/7."**

**Father O'Malley sits back in the easy chair in the corner. "Ah, don't be too hard on them, they're kids. Besides, this is a nervous event for some of them."**

**“Nervous, how?” Tiffany asks**

**“Well, I remember when my son Mark went to his first formal. He took a corsage and when she asked him to pin it on her somewhat low-cut dress, he was, let’s say, a bit nervous. Didn’t help the girl’s father was standing three feet away.”**

**“Hey, Nick, how’d that work out when Aliana went to her first formal? Did you hold a shotgun on the kid?” Joey asks, chuckling softly.**

**“Didn’t need too ... my reputation proceeded me. The kid brought one for Al to wear on her wrist,” he laughs, amusement and a tinge of nostalgia in his eyes.**

**The group grows silent.**

**Mike Daniels looks at his counterpart from St. Kate’s. “Tell me Bob, what percentage of these kids do you think we’ll see in the pews in ten years?”**

**“Maybe twenty, if we’re lucky; though it will probably be closer to ten to twelve,” Father Bob says, a reluctant tone in his voice.**

**“That high? These kids will be in their mid-twenties and most young adults tend to drift away,” Mike says.**

**“From where I stand, some, but not a whole lot,” Father John says, joining the conversation.**

**“Well then, maybe the real question is, how many will we see in the pews in twenty years,” Mike asks. “You think it will be any better?”**

“I do,” Father Bob says. “We’re seeing more young adults return in their late twenties and thirties.”

“Why?”

“Well, it’s common when they start having kids. There’s that desire to give their children some foundation. And, because we recognized something at St. Kate’s some years back. And set about correcting it.”

“Enlighten me,” Reverend Daniels says, curiosity in his eyes.

“Well, Mike, all those young ladies out there have different dresses, hair styles, jewelry, makeup, and shoes. But they all have one thing in common.”

“And that is ...”

“A corsage.”

“So.”

“So, a corsage has no roots. It’s something beautiful for a night, and then gets pressed in a scrapbook and fades to a memory. For many, religion becomes the same thing.”

“Corsage Catholicism,” Reverend Daniels says, chuckling at the words. “Interesting term, though Corsage Christianity might be better.”

Father O’Malley shakes his head. “A sad term really. But we see it in so many people nowadays. To many people, religion is trotted out on special occasions;

Christmas, Easter, Weddings, funerals, and such; then put back in the scrapbook of everyday life.”

“Why do you think that is, Father?” Kristi Martinson asks.

“Because their faith and its practice were never made relevant to them.”

“The seed that fell on rocky ground?” she asks,

“Exactly. But in this case maybe it isn’t so much rocky ground, as fertile soil we haven’t prepared properly. Soil barely capable of accepting the seed.”

“Think of it another way,” Joey adds, joining the conversation. “Any institution, be it a school, a business, a country, and even a religion, presents an image to the customer. But, if an image is all it offers, it will often fail.”

“Why?”

“Because the first thing any institution must do is create an identity; and establish, in the consumer’s mind, it’s beneficial and desirable. Something the consumer needs. It’s no different with faith.”

Sipping his coffee, Father John picks up on Joey’s thought.

“If all we do is offer devotions, rote prayers, rubrics, and rituals, we’re giving the kids a corsage. Something they apply. We need to give them a solid reason.

And that might be, Mike asks.

That they are made in the image and likeness. Get them to understand they're made to be wise, intelligent, productive, kind, and honest. Made to love and be loved. That's the identity we must build."

"And if we can get them to see and understand that, hopefully they accept the faith and its practice as relevant and necessary in their lives," Father Bob adds. "And we see them back in fifteen years or so ... or earlier ... even if they wander off the reservation for a time."

"And especially if they marry and start families?" Kristi asks..

A gentle smile lights up the pastor's face. "Right, Kristi."

"And the other important thing to get them to understand much of what the world offers, though it seems fun and satisfying, is like the weeds that eventually choke the wheat; the very success they're pursuing."

Pausing, Father Bob tops off his coffee cup, then continues his thought.

"Too often young people walk away with the idea that religion is just a scare tactic designed to deprive them of their fun and control their actions. We can't let it be just that."

"We need to teach them that faith enriches them in all areas of their lives," Father John adds. "In their

relationships; their sexuality, their families to come, their ability to be a success in life. Teach them the strength, the respect, the confidence and purpose we see when we look closely at Christ, are those qualities that need to be relevant in their lives. Not just some pie in the sky, 'Jesus loves you and one day He will come' trivial message they've heard since they were little."

"And too often it's just that," Mike Daniels says, a note of dejection in his voice. "I've heard it too often when overhearing the kids talk at school."

"Faith has to be like a flower with roots," Father Bob says, continuing Father John's thought. "Nourish the roots and the flower will grow; cut off their roots and the flower will make a nice decoration. Like a corsage, nothing more."

"Or don't establish the 'roots to begin with?" Mike asks

"Right. But, if we can get them to believe their identity is a precious and unique creation; believe they are made to live in the divine image then we have created something that, hopefully, will last."

Nodding in agreement with Reverend Daniels, Father Bob looks out over the assembled teens.

"We need to teach them their faith is an active, dynamic force in their life and ...

... not merely a whiff of nostalgia and a fading memory."

**For many, faith is like a corsage. A decoration.  
Something worn, not rooted in their life; something that  
can be removed when it isn't relevant, or convenient ...**

**... something you can't do with your roots.**

**Thinkabout it, I'm Tony Baggz.**

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