

What lurks deep inside a man can surprise you. Four men can attest to that fact.

## **A QUIET MAN**

"Say, Father, what was happening Thursday morning? I was driving by and it looked like a military parade or something."

"Yea, Father, Paul drove by too," Nick says ... "said he saw the same thing."

"It was a funeral. One of our parishioners," the pastor says.

"Anyone I know?"

"Fella named Peter Adamson."

"What happened?"

"He was at the Saturday vigil mass two weeks ago. One of the usher's told me he'd given up his seat to a very pregnant young lady, and while standing he had a stroke and collapsed."

Father Bob pauses a moment. "I'd hoped he'd be okay. Unfortunately, that wasn't to be. Pete passed away a week ago, Friday night."

"You know, what really bothered me ... I mean beyond his passing away," the pastor says after a short pause. "This ninety-two-year-old gentleman was the only one to help the young woman while a dozen people, teens and other young adults just sat there, oblivious."

Silence greets Father's words.

"Quite a sendoff, from what Paul said," Nick says after a moment. "He must have been someone important, judging from the crowd."

"Well, to the rest of us, he considered himself nothing special. But to those who really knew him, he was very special."

"Why, Father?"

"Because, Walt" ...

... "Pete stood tall in Hell."

**Hi, I'm Tony Baggz. Having finished the 5:30 Saturday evening Mass, Father Bob is in the narthex, talking with some of the parishioners when Walt Robinson Vinnie "Bullets," and Nick Kossarides stop by to say hello.**

**Seems Walt was driving by the church last Thursday and observed a large contingent of Marines in full dress uniform gathered outside the entrance. Obviously, that's piqued his curiosity. Come to think of it, mine too.**

*I'm not sure of all the particulars so what say we give a listen ...*

"Wait a minute ... do you mean, 'old Pete'", Bullets asks. "The fella who's always helping out in the parish hall; doing dishes, or sweeping up after an event."

"Yea, Vince, that's him."

"Yea," Walt says. "I never really knew him either. He was always just 'ole' Pete. I'd say hi when I saw him ... but that's about it."

"I know," Father says. "Pete kept petty much to himself."

"So, how much did you know about him, Father?" Nick asks.

"Well, actually, Pete was from out West ... Wyoming. He chose the neighborhood because he has some distant family here, it was affordable for a retired vet, and we have one of the best VA hospitals in the country. He lived quietly in the Homedale neighborhood with his wife, Elizabeth, until she died several years ago."

Shaking his head, Walt looks at Nick then at the pastor. "You said he 'stood tall in hell'. What'd you mean by that?"

"Well, what nobody knew is that during World War Two, he was in the Marine Corps. By his nineteenth birthday, he'd already seen action twice; on Tarawa and Saipan. Was awarded a Silver Star for his actions on Tarawa."

"No," Walt says, amazement in his voice. "Old Pete?"

"One and the same," Father says, his voice low and tinged with a hint of reverence.

"Then on the island of Peleliu, he singlehandedly held off a human wave attack so a dozen wounded marines could be evacuated. Then he attacked an enemy position, destroying it. He only stopped fighting when a squad of Marines relieved

him. He was wounded four times and awarded the Medal of Honor."

"Pete held the Medal of Honor?" Walt asks, eyes wide, an incredulous tone in his voice. "How did you find out, Father, if the rest of didn't have a clue?"

"Well, after a bereavement luncheon one evening, a couple years back, I invited him to dinner as a way of thanking him for all he did around the parish. During dinner I noticed a tattoo with the words 'Semper Fi' on his forearm and asked about it. That's when he told me the story."

Saying nothing, Vince, Walt and Nick listen intently.

"What amazed me was Pete's humility. I've known about the medal for a couple of years but haven't said anything. He asked me not to. He said the men who didn't come back were the real heroes; that he only did what had to be done. He took no credit and didn't want any. He didn't consider himself special, or worth any undue attention and I honored his wish."

"I'd have never thought" ... Vince says, his words trailing off.

"Pete taught me something," the pastor says "... what true humility is."

"How so?" Vince asks.

"Well, after a couple glasses of wine, Pete opened up a little. And what amazed me was his perspective and how he talked about the correlation between the awards he received, and how they dovetailed with our Catholic faith. It was important to him, he said, because it was his faith and the understanding, he drew from it that allowed him to come to grips with the horror he saw."

The pastor stops to acknowledge some parishioners, then continues.

"Pete said after the war, he was bothered by the sadness and death of so many men, many of them buddies. Then, one day in Mass, he heard our Lord's words; "greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for a friend." It was then, he said, he realized the men who died protecting us and our freedom, had that greatest love, and that realization opened him up to the possibility they now live in perfect joy and peace."

"And here we thought 'old Pete' was just another sort of anonymous fella who just liked doing things to keep busy," Walt says, shaking his head.

"Actually Walt, he was. That was his preferred way of living."

"Amazing," Nick says. "I wish I'd gotten to know him better."

"Me too," Vince adds. "I guess when it comes to some people, you never know."

"But you know Vince, what he went on to say impressed me more." Father Bob continues. "He said that there's a direct correlation between being a soldier and being a Christian. He drew a parallel between baptism and something called the National Defense Service Ribbon. That struck me."

"Please explain that one," Vince asks.

"Well, that ribbon is worn on the uniform of every service member. It says to the world, 'I will put myself in harm's way if necessary to protect the lives, the freedom, and the safety of the American people.'"

"Pete went on to say that in reading about the history of the Medal of Honor, he found many men during the Civil War, were awarded it for simply picking up the standard, the battle flag, from a fallen comrade, and carrying it forward."

"Just for carrying the flag?" Walt asks. "Seems a bit insignificant."

"At first glance, yes, but the flag was the standard, what the men followed. If it fell, confusion and death resulted."

That sly smile, father ... there's something else you're not saying Nick chuckles.

"Well, Pete went on to say, carrying the flag for the Christian ethic, our Catholic beliefs, especially the sanctity of all life; for the dignity and sanctity of marriage and the inherent dignity of all persons, will definitely get you shot at in this self-indulgent and self-centered world."

Father pauses, shaking his head.

"And just when I thought Pete couldn't amaze me any further, he said, by our baptism, we speak to the world of our commitment to live a life honoring our Creator, standing for the values He set forth. At our baptism, as in all our sacraments, the sign of the cross is first made over us. It is our standard."

"What I saw in Pete was the definition of humility. Not thinking less of himself, but thinking of himself less. And doing things quietly, without fanfare, benefitting others. Love one another as I have loved you. Christ's words ... words he faithfully lived out."

Again, the conversation lapses as Father Bob greets another couple. Then, turning back to Nick, Vince, and Walt, he says ...

"... Oh, and the young mother ... had a baby boy Thursday night. The night of Pete's funeral. The father called to tell me."

Father Bob pauses a moment, then smiles ...

"... They named the little guy, Peter."

**Mettle - a person's ability to cope well with difficulties or to face a demanding situation in a confident and resilient way.**

**The Book of Revelations tells us, 'Behold I come quickly. And my reward is with me to render to every man according to his works. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; the first and the last.' \***

**At that meeting, those who have the mettle to live out the promise of their baptism, carrying the standard of the faith, will hear, 'well done good and faithful servant' and be awarded eternal life ...**

**... the ultimate Honor.**

**Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.**

**\*Rev 22: 12,13**