A Longing for Connection Fulfilled

by Julia Occhiogrosso

It is a ritual that has become part of my husband’s Sunday morning routine. After the Eucharistic sharing at St. James the Apostle Church, we return to our home for Gary to prepare for his weekly visit to Von. Von has been part of our lives since the early nineties, when he showed up at the soup line. He now resides at a local care facility.

First the coffee is poured into a thermos, then the pastry is carefully wrapped. A couple of paper plates, napkins and paper cups are gathered and placed carefully in a cloth bag. With preparations completed, Gary heads out to see his friend Von and partake in another kind of sacramental sharing.

My earliest recollections of Von see him timidly approaching, making little eye contact, and speaking in mumbled verbiage that conveyed a fearful mistrust of people and desire to stay at a safe distance. Even with this he continued, cautiously, courageously, to come around. Slowly over many years he began to share pieces of his story.

He grew up as a foster child in Baltimore, worked for a while in a bread bakery, spent a good part of his adulthood in prison, and came by bus to Vegas. Von used his disability check to rent storage units to store his salvaged items. Homeless, his feet were often swollen with “mission legs” he developed from sleeping sitting up on long evening bus rides.

For a long time he would come by the Catholic Worker house and sit in the empty lot across the way. He refused our offerings of hospitality. He did finally accept a cup of coffee, sitting outside at the table in our backyard.

Over the years, Von has disappeared and reappeared like a phantom or an angel. We would not see him for a few years and we would think that he died and then he would show up again at our back gate, offering a found treasure.

Even during this latest period where Gary has maintained consistent contact with weekly visits, there was a period about a year ago where Von was moved into hospitalization and we had trouble locating him. Then, we received a call from the care facility staff informing Gary that Von was back and asking about him.

So once again, the weekly visits resumed and I happened to be with Gary upon the first of them. Von was bedridden now, so instead of meeting out in the lobby we entered his room unannounced. At the sight of Gary, Von was animated with child-like glee. Filled with grateful exclamations; “I thought you left town, I can’t believe you are here. I feel like the luckiest man alive!”

So many of the people we meet from the streets have suffered terribly in their lives. Trauma has detrimentally impacted their capacity to trust and cultivate meaningful relationships. They are lonely and alone in the world.

At the Catholic Worker we open our homes to the homeless in the form of hospitality, but more so, we want to offer a safe, merciful and accepting heart that leaves room for wounded ones to recover the buried longing we each have for human connection and companionship.

Like Dorothy Day wrote and Von and Gary have come to know, “Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet too, even with a crust, where there is companionship.”

Thank you for your financial support, it sustains our work.

Homage to Dorothy Day by Fritz Eichenberg

(Dorothy Day co-founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933)
by Robert Majors

Don’t say it’s okay
Without leaving your shoes
You’re on holy ground
In all that you do...
We wait until night
The air becomes cool
long line short beds
The shelter is full
Join the program
The night guard said
They’ll put you to work
Too busy to live
No time to get out
From the time you begin
Back at the start
When the program ends
Shelter the poor
Safe, dry and well fed
When the program ends
Back at the start
Or a new way of life
Where we raise our kids
The ugly hypocrisy of the ‘arms trade’,
Campaign Nonviolence
National Conference
Aug. 6-9, 2020 | Albuquerque, NM
Dolores Huerta, Richard Rohr,
Martin Sheen, Frida Berrigan & more
Peace Vigils at Los Alamos, NM
paceebene.org/events

Fr. Greg Boyle
author of ‘Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion’ will speak at the UNLV Judy Bayley Theater on Sat., Feb. 8, 2020 at 10 a.m., Tickets: $35
presented by Stillpoint Center for Spiritual Direction
(702) 243-4040 or stillpointcsd.org

Knights of Columbus
Christmas Breakfast for the Homeless
Wed., Dec. 25, 6:30 a.m.
Soup Line Closed
Dec. 26, 2019
to Jan. 4, 2020
Empty Bowl Benefit
March 14, 2020

Sacred Peace Walk
Walk from Las Vegas, NV to the NNSS (Nevada Nuclear Test Site)
April 4 - 10, 2020 (702) 646-4814
NevadaDesertExperience.org

View resources and take action at: JusticeforImmigrants.org

PLEASE JOIN US:
Wed.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.:
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
Wed.-Sat., 6:30 a.m.:
Breakfast served to 175-250 poor & homeless people.
Wed., 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.:
Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless folks home for showers, to wash clothes and for a great lunch.
Thurs., 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.:
Vigil for Peace: Thursdays in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:
50 lunches taken to the homeless.
Second Sat. of the month:
Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast for the homeless.
Third Sat. of the month:
Deliver food boxes to homes in need.

The Pope: not using or possessing nuclear arms will be added to the Catechism
By Vatican News, Nov. 26, 2019
During the in-flight press conference aboard the plane bringing him back to Rome from Japan, Pope Francis answered journalists’ questions on a variety of issues.

“Hiroshima was a real human catechesis on cruelty. I could not visit the Hiroshima museum because time did not permit, because it was a difficult day. But they say it’s terrible. There are letters from Heads of State, Generals explaining how a greater disaster could be produced. The experience was much more touching for me. And there I reiterated that the use of nuclear weapons is immoral, that is why it must be added to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Not only their use, but also possessing them: because an accident or the madness of some government leader, one person’s madness can destroy humanity. The words of Einstein come to mind: ‘The Fourth World War will be fought with sticks and stones.’”

“The ugly hypocrisy of the ‘arms trade’, European countries that talk about peace and live off weapons. This is hypocrisy, a word from the Gospels: Jesus said it in Matthew, Chapter 23. We have to stop this hypocrisy. It takes courage to say: ‘I can’t talk about peace, because my economy earns so much through arms sales.’ These are all things we need to say, without insulting and vilifying any country, but speaking as brothers and sisters, for the sake of human fraternity: we must stop because this is a terrible thing. A ship arrived in port from a country, that was supposed to hand over weapons to another ship that was going to Yemen, and the port workers said ‘no’. They did a good thing and the ship returned home. That’s one case, but it shows us in which direction we need to go.”

On July 7, 2017, the U.N. adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Please go to the website of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (winner of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize) at icawm.org to see how you can take action.

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