

DREAMS AND CONVICTIONS

I collect stories because they are so human and they often teach valuable lessons in easily digestible fashion. One of my favorites has to do with a woman who is Christmas shopping at the Cherry Hill Mall. This is the era pre-Cell phones. She has been on her feet for several hours and made a variety of purchases. She has several shopping bags and is tired. She heads for the CVS in the mall and buys a few cards. While checking out at the cash register she feels the urge for some chocolate, looks down and sees some candy and specifically a pack of Peanut Chews. She picks one up, has the clerk scan it and while her cards are being tallied she opens the candy and pops one nugget in her mouth. She pays and picks up her bags and heads for a mall bench to rest. She finds one that is occupied by an elderly gentleman who is reading the paper. She sits down beside him, arranges her bags and purse and is just about to dive into the next Peanut Chew when the man lowers his paper reaches down to the bench and picks up a Peanut Chew, pops it in his mouth and resumes reading the paper.

She shakes her head a moment because she isn't sure what she had just seen. "Did he just take some of my candy?" she asks herself mentally. She picks up a piece, puts it in her mouth and is thinking about the situation. Just as she is ready to eat another portion, he reaches down again, picks up another piece and puts it in his mouth. "That's it!" she thought. "What do you think you're doing?" she yells at him. He appears rather nonplussed. She grabs her bags and glaring at him stomps off down the mall. She is steaming mad and finally realizes she is going back in the direction of the stores she has just shopped. She stops and turns around to go back. She is now thinking that she let the man off much too lightly. She decides she is going to give him a piece of her mind and when she gets back to the bench, he is gone. But she spies him at an Auntie Anne's buying a cinnamon pretzel. With that she grasps a wonderful payback opportunity. She goes right up to him, takes the pretzel out of his hand, takes a big bite, gives it back, grins broadly, picks up her bag and heads down the mall. She feels good, really good. She heads back out to her car feeling pretty satisfied with herself.

However, on the way home she is calmer and she begins to think that maybe she overdid it. "Maybe he has Alzheimer's," she thinks. She is also rehashing how she is going to tell her husband about the incident. She is in the kitchen and puts her bags down. As she opens her purse to put away her car keys she sees a Peanut Chew candy bar with but one nugget missing. It is her Peanut Chew candy bar. "Well, what was I eating back at the....?" It all dawned. It was his Peanut Chew, not hers. She was mortified. There she is glaring at him and he must be thinking that she is nuts. Then the thing with the pretzel and the grin. "O my gosh, what have I done?" And what is that man going to say to his wife about the crazy lady at the Mall who ate his candy and then attacked him and his pretzel and he will say to his wife, "Honey, I was just sitting there

minding my own business, reading the paper, eating my candy bar and this women just came after me.” Do you think that man’s wife is going to buy his story?

That is a wonderful story and the more so because we have all been there. She was so sure she knew what was going on, that she understood what she was seeing and had things sized up correctly—AND SHE WAS WRONG!

Then we have today’s story about Joseph. How can he believe what Mary is telling him? If she is making this up to cover her sin he is heartbroken. If she is telling the truth then God is doing something here that is just too much for Joseph. In either case he decides to cut his losses and get out of the relationship. He is sure that there is nothing for him here. But he is wrong. The dream will teach him that. God will speak to him in that dream and Joseph will heed the meaning and change his mind. He will accept a very different role than the one he had in his own mind and in his own dreams.

The light that Christ brings is not a light that strikes fear but often we react with fear. The angel Gabriel tells Zechariah not to be afraid and Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary,” and Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take Mary into your home,” and the shepherds are told not to be afraid.

Sin is not all there is. There is grace—grace in abundance. Transforming grace. It is not true that things can never change; that hearts do not soften; that lives do not turn around; that sickness is not overcome. “Long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared and the soul found its worth.”

Has your soul found its worth? Do you still hold your sins back from the Christ child? Are you too sophisticated to give them to Him? Too proud? Too ashamed? Too afraid? Do you think you don’t have to? Do you think you shouldn’t have to? Or that you will somehow tarnish his purity or his goodness? Do you think that you can handle your sin yourself? Think again. If God forgives just one person one sin, then God will forgive each person all of our sins. But only if we hand them over, place them in his lap. This is God’s great gift—forgiveness. If you haven’t put your sins before Him, do it before you leave this church today. Do it before mass ends. His second gift is even better—life forever, without fear. Think about that. That’s the light that he brings and no fear can remain before that gentle light.

We have a choice right before us. We can put our whole and complete trust in Christ and His Way. And we can begin to live fully—in his light.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.