

WHAT DOES FAMILY HOLINESS LOOK LIKE?

From The Wall Street Journal 12/21/18

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He worked the door at my apartment building for more than 30 years. Everyone who knew him loved him. Now, too soon, he's gone. Carlos Nino came to the U.S. from Colombia at age 18. He had little money and education. But he kept two jobs to support his family and put his sons, Jason and Kenneth, through college.

I knew him for more than forty years. He started as a porter and then graduated to doorman. He greeted tenants and visitors alike with a smile and a warm hello. He stooped low to talk to babies and little kids. He ran outside to help elderly people carrying bags of groceries. Some door men become family. We talked about our children. Carlos once told me that his elder son Jason, just out of law school was already earning twice as much as he. You could see the pride radiating from his face.

A few years ago Carlos told me his wife was suffering from breast cancer. He planned to retire soon to help her. On his last day of work I handed him cards with signatures and messages from more than 100 hundred well-wishers. He touched his hand to his heart. He had no idea what to say, and so he said nothing—and everything. We stayed in touch and I learned his wife's cancer was in remission. But then Carlos himself became sick. His kidneys were failing. It was as if he had relieved his wife's suffering by taking it on himself.

I never saw him again. The last time we spoke by phone, he assured me his health was improving. As proof he pointed out that he had been able to walk around the block that afternoon. Word of his death, in Colombia, at age 64 reached me through a fellow doorman. Carlos was not only a dear man but a great doorman, a classic case of how your job is what you decide to make of it. He felt privileged to be a doorman and put his heart into his job every day. He is the story of an immigrant dream come true.

Carlos wanted to earn his keep and be of service. But some people are put on earth to show us how to be. He taught all who knew him an important lesson. Try to do some good—and do it while you still can.

My reflection in this year of the pandemic. A simple man. He opened doors for people, helped them carry their packages, made them feel welcome, worked hard, lived for his wife, sacrificed for his wife. Helped his kids. Was a good hard working dad. Is there any holiness in there? As his story unfolds didn't you get a little bit of a sense that that in the littleness and down-to-earth dimension of his daily life because Carlos was the way he was, the Lord was able to be there too? God with us. Emmanuel.

Don't you get the sense that the Lord was welcome in Carlos' home? In Carlos' life? I think he did take on his wife's sickness. I have seen that happen. I have seen that happen this very year. I have seen great sacrifices spouses make for their beloved. Why is the holy family holy? Because they made room for the Lord in their home and in their relationships, in their thoughts and in their emotions. It doesn't mean they were spared. Nor are we spared. But we are not abandoned. God is with us. Always.

Jesus comes to us and is very vulnerable and so are his parents. Happens a good bit in families. It is in family where vulnerability can actually be experienced without shame and peace CAN be found. That's what Mary, Joseph and Jesus bring to the family, to our families. You know there is a heavenly family that lies before us. There will be genuine care and familiarity and grace and all will be well. All manner of things will be well. There is a little bit of holiness in each of us around where the Holy Spirit indwells our souls. Do you know how you can see it? Whenever and wherever there is sacrifice going on, holiness is. We have to choose to believe it and choose to cooperate with it daily for the holiness to begin to show. But if it can show in Carlos the door man then it can show in us too. Mary and Joseph and Jesus would second that.

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