

The Holy Family

I quickly threw on the over sized purple bath robe destined to become regal garb and grabbed the life sized ornate incense pot that many years earlier I had discovered in an antique shop and had rescued from becoming a flower planter. This I had given as a birthday gift to my priest husband; now I was carrying it as a priceless gift to the Holy Child whose birth we were celebrating in this small church Christmas pageant. The second king had not shown up and while other more talented parishioners directed the play, as Lay Associate, I stood ready to fill in as needed. I might become a tattered shepherd wrapped in remnants from Claudia's closet, a town's person in a leftover hippie attire, or in this case to be suddenly transformed into a regal role.

The symbolic gift I bore, although priceless in its day, was pale beside the one given me by young Jeremy as he sat in his mother's lap more regal than life. This was surely a triumphant moment for him and the bearded father standing protectively beside him and the yet blushing bride mother who proudly held him. Three month old Jeremy might have felt some sense of identity with the Holy Child whose part he played – as he too was a “child of love” of his betrothed parents now married some nine months before – on what by co-incidence or perhaps Divine Providence happened to be the Feast Day of the Annunciation.

The poignant pain that surrounded that late March wedding on a cold rainy day instead of the sunny June celebration hoped for seemed now to dissipate and perhaps even to be understood, as the child filled his destined role of being for us God's gift of Love for this particular moment in time and space.

As I knelt there, my own identity too merged with that of a royal visitor bringing a treasured gift and I made it also my own royal offering of love to the One whose birth we were celebrating. But when I caught the vision of this modern day Madonna and Child seated in the classical pose and beauty – my eye caught hers and through her smile I thought I detected her own transcendent moment – one of quiet inner peace and radiant joy accompanying the gift of presence of her own child.

We had visited this couple some months earlier for a quiet at home Blessing of the Expectant Couple and had shared earlier with them the book of meditations for expectant couples, “Waiting in Hope” by Christine Dubois and Steve Bourne. So poignant had the meditations in this book been for them, that they confessed how wonderful it would have been if they could have had it during those first early agonizing weeks and months. It would surely have been a comfort as they suffered through the difficulties that had befallen this most gracious and prominent family of a tightly woven conservative mid-western community.

The Rite of Blessing, became for them far more than formal words, but became what it was meant to be – a true blessing – an anointing – a special gift of God's love and grace poured out on this dear and devout couple's life together. For them it held the same sacramental grace as the Rite of Marriage itself.

We had spoken about baptism – that the child is born with the gift of God’s spirit within. At baptism we celebrate that gift in community and ritualize it with the Sacrament of Baptism – pouring over the child blessed water symbolizing the gift of New Life and giving the child a lighted candle symbolizing the gift of the New Light of the Risen Christ. In much the same way that real marriage is the private commitment of love and trust between two people that is brought into community to be celebrated and to seek support through the sacramental grace of the rite of Marriage.

The couple exchanged glances and relief ran down their faces. An emotion that began in the intimate pastoral setting of the kitchen table was now brought to fruition as they set before this family sized congregation and represented for them the Holy Family that our Christmas pageant had sought to honor. They became that day in the eyes of the congregation and in their own acceptance, a family that was truly blessed and holy in God’s eyes.

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