**God’s Kingdom Comes When His Will Is Done**

Recently overwhelmed by my responsibilities for work, home, parish, and extended family life, I had some hard (for me) decisions to make about my schedule one morning. I almost succumbed to the temptation of choosing a somewhat easier “do what is comfortable-driven” option. A relative of a parishioner had passed away – I didn’t know them personally but the parishioner was someone I knew would appreciate my husband’s and my presence at the funeral to be held at a sister parish. Added to my temptation to not go was the fact that this person has been openly critical of my husband and myself throughout our time at this parish: she was not my favorite person. After saying a prayer for guidance, I realized that the Christ-like thing to do would be to go and pay my respects and rearrange my work schedule for the day. I work remotely, so I have some flexibility to do this.

 On the way to the funeral I was driving through a shady area of town – the kind of place that when passing through you check that your car doors are locked. My eyes happened upon a certain scene at a car dealership. There was a tall, muscular man speaking to another man of slighter build. The larger man’s back was to me, and his head hung low and he appeared to be broken with grief as he braced himself upon an open car door. The other man whose kind face I could see, wrapped his arm in a comforting gesture around the other’s neck. In an instant my heart swelled at the sight of the filial display unfolding before me. I locked eyes for a brief moment with the man facing me and said a prayer for both of them as I drove onward. The whole encounter lasted seconds - yet fed me with a taste of something eternal.

This little glimpse I had of the love shared between two grown men deeply affected me throughout that day as my mind was drawn back to the memory of their connection. There, out in the open for everyone to see, they both allowed themselves to be vulnerable: one man’s pain obviously so deep that he could not lift his head, the other’s compassion so great that he did not hold back from acting on it. It was a fulfillment of the prayer “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” – and resulted in God’s Kingdom coming for them, for me, and for God-knows how many others.

Today another similar thing happened to me. In an effort to plan an area event featuring a panel of priest wives, I have been forced to do something I find difficult and uncomfortable: call people on the phone. Maybe it’s the perfectionist in me who would rather be able to text and edit my words before sending. Maybe it’s the awkward shyness that I still find to be an obstacle for me in connecting with people. Whatever the reason, I was resisting calling a certain retired priest and his wife whom I had only met briefly on one or two occasions. I felt nudged by the Lord to call this couple repeatedly for days, and when a fellow presvytera mentioned that I try reaching out to them, I took that to be a message from God as well. Still, I put it off.

God persisted, however. You know that prompting you feel deep inside your conscience when you know you should do something? Well, it wouldn’t stop. Finally, I relented against its constant pestering and called. I would like to share some of the details of this dialogue as I recall them, while changing the priest’s name for privacy’s sake.

Me: “Hello Father John, this is Presvytera Melanie DiStefano. How are you?”

Fr. John: “Hello!” *(joyfully)* Well, I’m doing fine! Don’t know if you’ve heard but my legs went out from under me so I’m not serving anymore*…”(also said joyfully and slightly out of breath)*

Me: “Oh, I’m so sorry, I hadn’t heard that.”

Fr. John: “Yes, well I think it’s all the apple picking I used to do for my mother when I was young catching up with me…used to have to walk for miles and up and down lots of hills gathering and carrying. I would make $3.00 a day doing it, and bring it home to my mother. She would give me $0.25 to get a milkshake, but I didn’t get a milkshake. *(Pause)* Instead I bought cigarettes!” *(Laughing heartily)*

…”Yes, smoked cigarettes for years until a good doctor told me ‘It’s either cigarettes or the priesthood’. I finally quit the cigarettes. I thank God for that doctor and pray for him still today! I had some growths on my vocal cords and he removed them without saying anything the first time. Second time they started growing back, he told me I had a choice to make. I am so grateful to that doctor for being straight with me. Who knows if I’d have my lungs today!”

Me: *(Trying to comment to no success)*

Fr. John *(Continuing)*: “So how are you and Father? You’re so young! In the middle of beautiful life with lots of things you can do!!!”

Me: “We are fine Father, not exactly young anymore, but we’re doing fine…I was calling to see if your wife might be interested in participating on a Priest Wives’ Panel in October. It’s a question/answer panel about our experiences as priest wives.”

Fr. John: *(So Sweetly)* “Oh, I’m sorry. You see, my wife is in beginning stages of dementia. She would love to do it mind you, but I know it would get her all excited and then she’d never be able to actually do it…yes, she was teacher for 28 years, raised two children, helped at the parish...has so much she could offer, but it would be too much for her…”

Me: *(Feeling my chest tightening a bit)* “Of course Father, I’m sorry I didn’t know….is there anything - “

Fr. John *(interrupting obliviously, gently):* “We have a daughter who is a nurse and she never married and we are living with her now. She does sooo much for us!!! She takes care of us and does such amazing work as a nurse. So I’m sorry, we are 87 years old now and I wish we could help you but we just can’t anymore. Not sure why the Lord hasn’t called us home yet, but here we are! *“ (chuckling a bit)*

Me: “Father, is there anything we can do for you?”

Fr. John: “Oh no, Pani!” *(with sincere joy and sweetness in his voice)* No, no. What you can do for me is this: Live a good life! Enjoy it! Be happy! Love one another! That’s what you can do for me.”

Me: *(chest tightening, eyes welling up)*, “Thank you Father.”

I hadn’t wanted to make that call, and though the result of the call was not an additional panelist for the event, what I received far exceeded what I could have hoped for. The love, joy, sincerity that poured forth from Fr. John’s voice was a gift from God. His wisdom priceless, I felt as if my loving Father in heaven was truly speaking through him especially for me to hear. It was another “Kingdom come” moment.

In both cases I started out with strong inclinations to avoid doing what I knew God was prompting me to do. I don’t always listen to that inner prompting mind you, but the experiences of God’s love that I encountered recently when I did, have inspired me to consciously fight harder through my tendency to self-isolate.

When we do what we know would be the God-pleasing thing even when we don’t feel like doing it, we put ourselves in a position to be a direct recipient of His grace. We encounter love being shared, offered, and reciprocated in ways we never would have imagined. Doing our part to fulfill the prayer “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” opens the door for God’s Kingdom to come – for Him, for us, and for God-knows how many others.