

Feb. 14, 2016

Battling the giant spiders of strife

It was a Thursday in Dodge City. I was sitting in my penthouse office at Catholic central when there was a knock at the door. I looked up surprised, since my office doesn't have a door.

Knowing my office had no door, the visitor had brought his own so he'd have something to knock on.

He was haggard (the appearance, not the Merle), medium height, and had short cropped graying hair which belied his 30-some years. He seemed to possess a curious manner which belied his tired appearance. There was a lot of belying going on.

He told me he had questions. Big questions. About life. The why's, the what's, the where's. Well, not so much the where's. He said he had a *Garmin* for that. They were questions that only the shepherd of the diocese, Bishop Brungardt, could answer, but since the bishop was on a school visit to Ness City, the man came to the second most spiritual, knowledgeable, and generally likable person in southwest Kansas. But Corkie from Corkie's Automotive was also out of town.

So were plumbers Greg and Denny Werner, Penny the Walmart pharmacist, retired farmer Phil Hastings, fifth grade teacher Mrs. Marlinton, highway patrolman Lester Mondragon, rubbish removal engineer Davis Stritch, the entire seventh grade class at Hodgeman County School in Jetmore, every person in the Scott City phone book, and a feral cat named Furball.

That's when he decided to pay my office a visit.

He told me he had lived in a home, home on the range of Kansas for 15 years, yet had recently found himself uttering discouraging words. I assured him that it wasn't unlawful, and he need not fear civil action. He gave me a strange look and dialed his phone to see if Furball the cat had become available.

"God created men and women," he uttered as he slipped his phone into his pocket, "and the earth we live on. Yet, we have a world filled with strife. Now imagine your Uncle Bill."

"I don't have an Uncle Bill."

"That's not the point. Imagine you *did* have an Uncle Bill, and imagine that his pride and joy is a tiny village he constructed on a large sheet of plywood--you know, with one of those old Lionel train sets."

"Can we make him Uncle *Bob*? I had an Uncle Bob, and I can see him doing something like this."

"Sure," he said with a deep sigh. He seemed a little exasperated, so I asked:

"Would you like some hot chocolate?"

"No. So, imagine...."

"Nesquik?"

"NO! Can we just...."

"Hot vanilla latte with chocolate sprinkles?"

"Yes, that would be nice."

"Oh ... sorry. We don't have that. I was sure you'd say no."

"FINE!" he said, his hands formed in a choke-hold. "So, your Uncle Bob creates this little world. Now, can you imagine your uncle having any of his imaginary people in his imaginary little world committing crimes? Going to war? Contracting horrible diseases? And yet, our love is nothing compared to the love of God. So, why would He create a world with so much misery, especially if He has so much love for us?"

My first thought was that the guy could really use a few laughs. My second thought was that my foot itched. Then I considered his dilemma. Then I scratched my foot.

"Okay," I said, "first off, the world Uncle Bob created would either be in an attic or basement, since a large plywood village wouldn't be allowed in the living room. Therefore, there's every possibility that the village would be beset upon by bugs, probably some spiders. Did Uncle Bob think about how the people would react to giant spiders invading their village?"

His mouth was agape. I took it as a sign of intense concentration.

"I don't know much," I continued (to which he nodded vigorously), "but I do know that if southwest Kansas were beset upon by giant spiders, *that* would cause strife. It would probably be the strifiest strife in the state's history."

The man shifted in his chair. He suddenly had the appearance of someone at a restaurant who wanted to call out, "Check, please!"

“But the primary differences between God’s world and the world in your example aren’t in the worlds themselves,” I said. “The differences are in the creators.”

Suddenly he looked interested. That or he had indigestion.

“Our Lord is not only our creator, but He has literally injected Himself into our hearts and minds. My Uncle Bob was a great guy, but that’s a little beyond his skill-set. In doing so, the Lord gave us a path, our own Yellow Brick Road to the Eternal City.

“We’re not here to experience a perfect life or a world without strife,” I said. “You want an answer to the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of our existence? Simply put, I think it’s that we were created *from* love to *give* love. Unconditionally. Without exception. And not *despite* the hardships and strife, but *because of* them.”