

Nov. 19, 2017

The parable of the velvet Elvis

The other morning, I climbed out of bed and looked out onto the back porch. Just as I peered through the curtains, I overheard one cat say to another cat, “You fool! You mad fool! You’ve doomed us all!”

Hmmm. Should I do something? *Naaa.* I figured one of them probably just used their supper dish for a latrine again. Sure, they’re cute and lovable, but cats aren’t exactly blessed in the intelligence department.

But they *are* a gift from God, to be sure. One little grey one, regardless of what I’m doing in the yard—whether I’m mowing or trimming trees—will just suddenly materialize on my shoulder! Sometimes he’ll leap from a near-by branch or wait until I’m leaning over before gently leaping to my shoulder.

At other times, though, I’m standing in the middle of the yard, no trees around, and suddenly he’s just ... *there!* (I’m guessing that he climbs up the lattice work onto the roof, and when he sees me, he leaps down while deploying some sort of parachute device, which he quickly and cleverly conceals after landing on my shoulder. That’s the only explanation that makes sense.)

Even these somewhat annoying, somewhat moody cats are a gift from God.

When I think about it, *everything* is a gift from God! When I get gas, I thank God! When I go to Taco Bell, I thank God. But I repeat myself.

Only the gift of His son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, is greater than His gift of our life and our lives, of Mother Nature. Of the sun and the moon and the stars.

When we have one of those awesome Kansas sunsets, for example, I try to drink it down like cold water on a hot day, letting it run through me, nourishing my heart, refreshing my soul. (Wow, that was seriously poetic. Or nauseating, depending on your viewpoint.)

It’s important to wrap our arms around God’s gifts and let Him know how much we appreciate them, especially in these weird days of nuclear threats, mass shootings and who-knows-what-else by the time this issue goes to press.

Consider if you will, a man walking into the home of a friend to whom he gave his favorite collection of velvet Elvis paintings.

His friend had always admired them, staring at them, transfixed. He thought they were “so super cool.” So, the man with the paintings gathered up his storehouse of generosity he’d been saving for the Catholic Vibrant Ministries Appeal, and used it to instead to gift his Elvis paintings to his friend.

One day a few months later, he walked into his friend’s home, looking forward to seeing his beloved velvet Elvis paintings lining his friend’s living room wall. But ... *where were they?* he wondered sadly. Wherever he looked, not even one velvet Elvis!

He couldn’t hide his pained expression. He felt a tear escape.

His friend understood why he was upset. He pretended to have a sneeze coming on while she tried to concoct an answer.

“They’re, uh, in storage ... until I figure out ... where I, uh, want to hang them,” he said, mentally congratulating himself on coming up with the excuse.

The 15 seconds he spent thinking between each word told him that his friend hadn’t being entirely truthful about the paintings.

The original owner of the velvet Elvis paintings represents God. And the paintings are the many, many, many, *many* gifts He has bestowed upon us, His children.

What are your velvet Elvis paintings? Which do we accept? Which do we reject?

Some of my favorite of God’s gifts? Deep blue skies. Dogs and cats and monkeys and soap. Fried shrimp and milk shakes and Carol Burnett. Mountains. Fields of wheat. Trees and Turner Classic Movies.

What do you see as a gift from God?

How about people? When I think how thankful I am for dogs, I think about people, and how thankful I am for dogs.

Sometimes I struggle to be thankful for people. Even the person next to me in the pew will smile and shake my hand at the sign of peace, but when I want them to let me into the line of departing traffic after Mass, it’s *everyone for themselves!*

It’s no wonder we’re divided. We’re bombarded with things that are so divisive!

If we’re living right, we’ve got to be hating or fearing someone! If you’re not disgusted with *fill-in-the-blank*, then what the heck is the matter with you?

Christ and his Church teaches that we love each other as God loves us. That includes each and every one of the *fill-in-the-blanks*.

So, the other day I’m at Penney’s waiting for what seems like eons for my wife to come out of the dressing room. (That’s not an exaggeration. She once spent an entire eon trying on a new blouse.) People filtered by, people of differing races: moms, dads, little children. I thought about how each one was as indelibly created a child of God as I was, each a totally unique universe of thoughts and memories, each a best selling story of God’s creation.

They may have starkly opposing politics, or belong to a faith I don’t entirely understand. Or worse yet, they may not like Godzilla movies (shudder). Yet, as each passed by, I imagined them likened to shooting stars, a world unto themselves passing by me in an instant, each one the greatest celebration of God’s awesomeness.

God wants to see these impossibly wonderful gifts—these Elvis paintings of life—on our walls. He wants to know that we recognize and appreciate the multitude of His gifts, not so much to honor Him, but simply to get the most out of the life He’s given us. This in itself honors Him!

In doing so we can more easily recognize with crystal clarity just how many of those gifts of His goodness that we have failed to embrace. Have even shunned. *Each other? The Earth He created?*

Everywhere you turn, there’s another velvet Elvis waiting to be appreciated.

It’s as literal and real as any mathematical equation: The more we fill our hearts with appreciation for God’s gifts, the happier and more fulfilled we will be.