

May 19, 2019

## **Mooooooooooooo!\***

It was a cool, spring day in Colorado. I set my wipers on “intermittent” to clear the slowly building mist that came down like a series of sneezes from Mother Nature. The sky was white, as if someone had draped a large, blank sheet of printing paper across it.

I was driving home to Denver to spend Easter with my mom. Cows dotted the southeast Colorado landscape. I opened my window and shouted, “Moooooooooo!” They mooooo’d in reply, which, if I spoke cow, I would know meant, “*What ... what’d that guy say?*”

“I don’t know. Something about his cousin, I think. I couldn’t make it out.”

“Did he give a name?”

“No, that’s really all I got. He was moving out. Sounded like he was driving a 6.2 liter V6.”

“*Naaaa*. We’re talkin’ Subaru. Zippy little cars, but 2.5 liter, V4, max.”

“Have you seen the new Fords?”

Of course, to you and me, it was just, “Mooo.” “Moooooooo?” “Moooooooo.” “*Mooooooooo.*”

During those seven or so hours of relaxed driving through the serene hinterlands of Kansas and Colorado, I was able to get comfortably lost in thought. One of my great gifts, a superpower, if you will, is my ability to daydream for hours on end. It just comes naturally to me! It’s great when waiting two hours for the doctor, or when I’m at a meeting. My record is four days of day-dreaming, stopping only for sleep and reruns of The Andy Griffith Show.

Nearing the end of my journey, I found myself lodged in the quagmire of Denver traffic. I suddenly had to heighten my alertness to Defcon 5, which threw me into high-stress, ultra-sensitivity mode after already being tired from the long drive — a place where I’ve never been known to thrive.

Suddenly a couple of gorillas in a work truck pulled behind me. I was going the speed limit (or thereabouts) for downtown Denver. There was space in front of me, but none to either side. They were so close to me that it would have been difficult to pirouette in between the vehicles, had someone been so inclined to do so, which I wouldn’t advise. There is a time and place to pirouette, and in between cars on a busy highway is not one of them. (Just in case you’re ever tempted.)

I felt the first embers of stress-induced anger boiling up inside of me. I looked back and the gorilla at the wheel was furiously waving for me to get out of his way. In my anxious state of mind, I began to pull over, only to have a semi blow by, startling me into an even higher state of agitation as I narrowly avoided a bad accident.

And still they stayed adhered to my bumper.

Nervous to the point of exploding like an egg in the microwave, I was able to finally zip over and let him past. I was tired. I was intensely angry. He’d been driving poorly, irresponsibly. He could have caused an accident. Rather than get his license plate number, track him down and present a lecture to him on “Positive Driving Skills and You” (coffee and doughnuts to follow), I let him know in a less refined manner that he needed to improve his driving etiquette.

Suddenly they weren’t in a hurry any more. They immediately slowed down to the speed limit. A window opened. The passenger motioned for me to catch up to them. All while driving along a very busy highway during rush hour.

I couldn’t see any positive outcome to inflaming the situation any further, especially on a busy highway, so I kept my current speed, and suddenly he was lost in traffic ahead of me.

The event reminded me for the umpteenth time that I am a real tough guy. I’m like Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood mashed into one. Probably one of the toughest guys who has ever lived, like an action movie star times ten.

Just ... just as long as no one confronts me.

Why? I'm afraid of what I could do to them. I'm afraid of my own toughness. Because of my intense masculinity, I have to hold it inside, pretend to be submissive.

No, that's not quite right. It's actually when confronted that I realize that the chip on my shoulder has been placed there by an ethereal bad boy who likes a good joke. Because: I'm not an action hero; I'm not a tough guy, at least not in the Hollywood sense.

I'm a follower of Christ. That means that I seek peace. It means I don't seek to make things worse. That person on the highway was just someone pretending to be me.

When I arrived at my mom's assisted living center, I suddenly found myself in a difficult situation with a staff member. That chip-on-my-shoulder lesson hadn't yet been learned. I let my agitation show.

But as the lesson of the highway gorillas took root over the hours to follow, I became more and more at peace. With everything. Even the smelly Easter lily.

I learned that being an emissary of Christ's peace is not for sissies. You have to swallow a natural urge to give in to your agitation. It doesn't mean not standing up for yourself or someone else; it doesn't mean that you will never raise a fist; it doesn't mean that you'll always walk away from a fight.

It means taking the road less travelled, working for peace *first and utmost*, until *all options* have been met.

A few days later I met up with the same staff person. We talked, we smiled, we laughed. I injected Christ into a tough situation, and the outcome was ... well, Christ-inspired.

It isn't always easy, but the rewards? The rewards are, as Bishop John alludes, "more than you could ask or imagine."

*\* Swallowing pride; digesting adversity*