

By
Joe Sixpack



His Only Gift

Barnaby was a juggler, a little man of no importance who traveled with a circus in France and did tricks for children. In the village square he'd spread out a carpet and juggle a tin pie plate on his nose, then stand on his head and juggle six golden balls in the air and catch them with his feet. People would toss pennies on the carpet. After the crowd had gone, Barnaby would always kneel down to thank God for the pennies. *He understood that all good things come from God.*

One winter day, a jolly fat monk on a white mule asked Barnaby if he'd like to come to the monastery with him. Barnaby answered, "Will they let a poor ignorant man like me enter so holy a place as a monastery?"

"Of course," said the monk. "We're all ignorant before God." So Barnaby got on the mule, wrapped his arms around the fat monk, and they both laughed as they headed off for the monastery.

After performing for the monks that night, Barnaby bowed before Father Abbot and said, "Father, let me stay here. I can't ever be a holy man, but just let me work—mop up the kitchen and work in the stable." When the Abbot consented, Barnaby promised himself he'd never use his juggling articles again. He was very happy in his new home, until the day before Christmas. He saw each monk bring a gift for the Christ child. Brother Maurice brought some pictures he'd made based on the Bible, Brother John brought a statue he'd carved, and Brother Ambrose brought a new hymn he'd composed for the occasion. But Barnaby said, "I'm just a poor ignorant man; everybody has a gift to offer except me."

On Christmas Eve, after all the monks had gone to bed, the jolly fat monk ran down the hall and rushed into Father Abbot's cell. He exclaimed, "Something bizarre is happening in the chapel!" Both men rushed to the choir chapel, and the Abbot turned pale. He exclaimed, "God forgive him; he's gone mad."

Down below was Barnaby. He had spread out his carpet before the statue of Our Lady, and kneeling reverently, he was performing his juggling act. He juggled six golden balls in the air, then a pie plate on his nose.

"We've got to grab him and take him away," said the Abbot.

But suddenly a bright light filled the chapel, and the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary began to move toward Barnaby. When she came close to him, Barnaby bowed before her, took the hem of her blue robe, then reverently kissed it. There was a smile on Our Lady's face. Then the light dimmed and Our lady vanished.

The Abbot said slowly, “Our Lady accepted the only Christmas gift he had to give. Blessed are the simple of heart, for they shall see God.”

Barnaby did this act for Our Lady, not the statue. Our Lady was pleased with Barnaby’s veneration. Great deeds aren’t necessary to make acts of veneration. You can honor the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints with simple devotion, and Our Lady and the saints will be pleased.

Our separated brethren tell us this is idolatry, because the first commandment forbids graven images. So does the first commandment allow us to make use of statues and images?

Yes, provided they don’t become objects of false worship. God forbade the Jews to make graven images because they lived among pagans, and that influence made them inclined to worship images.

Those who would accuse Catholics of violating the first commandment because of our use of statues and holy cards don’t properly interpret this commandment. We know that the Jews didn’t interpret this commandment as an absolute prohibition against images. There are many examples in the Bible to prove this. God forbade images in the first commandment, yet he ordered the brazen serpent (Numbers 29:8-9), and the golden cherubim atop the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-20). Then there were also the carved garlands of flowers, fruit and trees (Numbers 8:4), and the carved lions that supported the king’s throne (I Kings 7:27-37).

To criticize Catholics for the use of images isn’t honest. In order for these critics to be honest they’d have to forbid themselves the personal use of coinage, currency, photographs, sculptures, paintings, and even television. Obviously, they don’t do that, nor will they.

We’re also criticized for praying *to images*. Do Catholics pray to images, crucifixes and statues? Absolutely not! When Catholics pray before such images they are praying to the persons those images represent. Many of us carry photographs of our spouse or children, but we never mistake the photograph for the child himself.

Such images and statues should be treated with the same respect we would treat pictures of our loved ones. If you’re not already doing it, you should get into the habit of venerating crucifixes, holy cards, medals, and statues on a regular basis. Carry some with you. Personally, I’m never without my rosary, Miraculous Medal, and a medal of St. John Bosco—the patron saint I call on for all my evangelistic work.

Do you want to learn and understand more about our holy and ancient faith—things like this? With all the confusion and turmoil in the Church these days, we really need to learn and understand all we can. Well, I’ve got you covered for that!

First, there is the JoeSixpackAnswers.com website, on which you can find answers to all your questions. There’s a free email course about the faith you can sign up for, and a new short lesson will arrive to your inbox every three days. You’ll also begin getting special invitations to the free webinars I host each week. Or you can visit Amazon to get the Joe Sixpack—The Every Catholic Guy book called *Secrets of the Catholic Faith*. (There are other books as well.)

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